This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google

600071573T

250. b. 56.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# CHANGE;

OR,

## SOME PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF

## BASIL RUTHERFORD.

BY

EMILY CUYLER.

"But when he came near,
Beholding how steep
The sides did appear,
And the bottom how deep;
Though his suit was rejected,
He sadly reflected,
That a lover forsaken
A new love may get,
But a neck that's once broken
Can never be set!"

LONDON:
L. BOOTH, 307 REGENT STREET, W.
1861.

Digitized by Google

LONDON:
STRANGEWAYS & WALDEN (LATE G. BARCLAY), PRINTERS,
28 Castle Street, Leicester Square.

Digitized by Google

TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

THIS BOOK

IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# CHANGE.

## CHAPTER I.

A COLD, sunless evening, in the month of March, the sky monotonously clear, the wind biting. At Hammerton station all was bustle and confusion; the down-train had come in a good hour later than it was due there. In itself that untoward circumstance might sufficiently account for the unwonted degree of excitement prevailing on the platform; but to judge from the predominating agitation, and the cross, disconsolate faces of the travellers, as, one by one, they turn out from the snug, warm carriages into the nipping air, it is only natural to infer that if the accident causing their tardy arrival had been actually slight in its consequences, it must have proved, in result, of serious inconvenience to many.

Such had been the case. Hammerton was a junction station; it was an object with a large proportion of the passengers to catch the 4·10 train from thence to Stapleford. "*L'homme propose,*" &c. &c. I blush to quote even the



Digitized by Google

half of so hackneyed an aphorism. Owing to the unanticipated hindrance encountered by the road, that train had gone on its way puffing; and they left lamenting, with no possibility of proceeding onwards for the next three hours to come.

The various forms their annoyance assumed could not fail to afford amusement to an uninterested observer; there was so much of the ludicrous blended with the discomfiture of the busy scene.

Some, in wondrous bursts of eloquence, their flow of words speaking well for the sound state of their lungs, were edifying a very unsympathetic audience with the story of their wrongs and troubles; whilst the amount of exercise taken by another portion was perfectly marvellous to behold: up and down, hither and thither, without pause or rest, they went. Had you been present, you would have thought countless representations of Miss Kilmansegg and her golden leg, or the equally wonderful man with the steam arm, were perpetually passing and repassing before your astonished vision! Distracted railway officials were vainly endeavouring to lay the storm. The station-master was nearly annihilated by the clamorous outpourings of wrath from the lips of an elderly gentleman who had pounced upon him in an unwary moment, and who, now by roundly abusing him, the directors, and the line in general, now by threatening to place the matter in the hands of his solicitor, was endeavouring to obtain a special train put

Digitized by Google

on for his own peculiar benefit. The rest grumbled, lamented, and grumbled again. But there was no redress to be obtained, no remedy but such as time and patience would bring. Their rage will calm down presently; as it is, no one pays much heed to it. Those spasmodic movements and angry, mortified sounds, are merely lashings of the tail of the British lion — the like of which, rest assured, may be seen and heard whenever certain worthy members of the free and enlightened people typified by that lordly beast are under the influence of a grievance! They somehow seem to consider it necessary for the right and proper maintenance of their dignity and importance that this much-to-be-marvelled-at and very unaccountable circumstance should be officially notified to the world at large — "to suffer and be still," is no household precept of theirs!

Well, the world at large can afford to bear with and pardon the disturbance Englishmen are in the habit of making about trifles; their irascible complainings, their voluble grumbling at imaginary oppressions and persecutions, are but the safety-valves by which the puerilities and self-importance common to all mankind make their escape; the sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, in whose empty holiday clatter — the superabundant vanity and self-consciousness of which every one has, more or less, a share in their composition — are exhausted, leaving the man strong, unobtrusively to bear great troubles and endure hardships, with such

Digitized by Google

noble powers of fortitude, such iron self-reliance, in such stern, grand taciturnity!

But in modern travelling, inconvenience or *contretemps* is a trial no Englishman is educated to bear with stoicism, one and all being equally infatuated with the notion that the ticket purchased at starting is imbued with a magical property to ensure going a-head from the beginning to the end of their journey, without obstacle or impediment. It having been the will of Destiny an accident should have been the order of the day, it would have been as well if gratitude that it had been unimportant in issue had been the dominant feeling in their breast: not so, bluster and fret over an untoward, if unavertable occurrence, the greater number must, after the fashion of true-born Englishmen.

Meanwhile, Basil Rutherford has learnt his fate from the first with extreme composure; yet the inconvenience is far greater to him than to any other person present: failing to catch this all-important 4·10 train, he cannot reach his ultimate destination until the following day.

He has no particular fancy for a *séjour* at Hammerton, but it is a better location than Stapleford; and as a night's lodging at one or other place is unavoidable, he has quite made up his mind to stay where he is, and the next morning proceed on his journey rejoicing.

Basil is apt to take the world easily, and to make a virtue of accepting events as they chose to come to him; having in earlier days allowed self-will fiercely and perseveringly to wrestle with

Digitized by Google

life, and ordained things, as Jacob at Penuel, even until the breaking of day, and prevailed not, he has learnt the better wisdom of submission.

Having quietly secured his own luggage, leaning against a pillar smoking a cigar, he has for some time past been engaged in heartily enjoying the useless agitation of his less stoically disposed fellow-travellers. The first hot fire of words was already smouldering down into inexpressive ashes, and, growing weary of his amusement, Mr. Rutherford threw away the end of his cigar, and putting himself into the railway omnibus, in that delectable conveyance he was driven up to the doors of the Royal Oak Hotel.

He ordered dinner to be ready by seven o'clock, and then strolled into the town. Little was to be seen there. The streets were narrow, the shops poor, the people he met looked ugly; red noses, blue lips, and white cheeks predominating. A March wind is not a beautifying cosmetic to the human face. Then, the streets were pitched instead of paved, and hurt his feet; his habitual indifference was not proof against that ill to his flesh. How was he to kill the next two hours? He remembered having heard people talk of the beauty of a ruined abbey, situated somewhere outside the town. He puzzled out the road, and wandered at will, amidst broken arches, ivied windows, and crumbling walls; and in vague train his thoughts wandered also from the mouldering relics of the dead past surrounding him, to the vicissitudes of his own chequered life; to shattered hopes, bright visions

Digitized by Google

never realised, forgotten days rarely allowed a place in memory now; until, finding himself growing gloomy and misanthropical, he suddenly made the discovery that he was likewise very hungry; and so, choosing to ascribe the undesirable mental results of his exploration to a craving after the flesh-pots of Egypt in the shape of his dinner, he abruptly quitted the ruins to return to the inn, having seen nothing in his pilgrimage that left a distinct impression on his mind, save a passing glimpse of a golden-haired child in earnest conversation with a boy some years her senior, upon whom he had accidentally stumbled at a turn in the abbey. Carelessly noticing them at the time, whilst unconsciously speculating what could have awakened that train of musing on other days, he called to mind the little girl—an expression on her face, a look in her clear blue eyes, as with uplifted gaze she eagerly addressed her companion, had struck that rarely-touched chord. He wondered why a child, on whom he had merely expended a casual glance, should so have stamped herself upon his recollection. She was no daintily-tricked-out darling of an indulgent mother, but a poorly-clad, commonplace little girl, in a print frock, thick shoes, and a worn straw-bonnet; scrupulously neat and clean, but that was all; the opportunity lost, he felt regretful he had not more closely observed her. Thinking himself very foolish for his pains, he even went so far as to retrace his steps to the spot where he had seen the pair: they were no longer visible.

Digitized by Google

Basil was glad of it—at least he assured himself he was so; but he looked dissatisfied, and there was a very stern and formal air about him as he stalked along the streets, and ascended the stone steps of the hotel.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER II.

HASTENING on from house to house, delivering the evening letters, the postman was pursuing his monotonous duty in the town of Hammerton.

Up the opposite side of the retired street wherein Roland Kirkland's lodgings were situated, he and his wife listened to the sharp abrupt knocks following one another in rapid succession.

Waiting for the post! One of the sharpest trials of patience, amongst the many minor miseries of human life, wherewith Dame Necessity disciplines her victims into Fortitude. Who has not gone through the depressing anxiety? Who has not learnt, by personal experience, what concentrated essence of torturing excitement can, in a few moments, be distilled from solicitude and suspense over the furnace of expectation, whilst lingering in doubt whether *to-day* will place in their possession the special letter, the desired tidings they so eagerly crave to receive! It had been a chilly, blustrous day, and Roland was feeling more languid and ailing than he had done for some time

Digitized by Google

previously. He lay on a couch drawn close to the fire, his wife sitting near, nominally employed upon some homely needlework, but far more occupied in furtively watching him—mental exertion, or disquietude of any kind, was so injurious to him. In the tightly-closed eyelids and firm grasp of his interlaced hands, she could well read how active his mind, how acutely suspense was trying him.

The postman's knocks were growing fainter. They had so often listened to the sound, in the forlorn hope of receiving a long-expected letter, that they could precisely judge by it what point in his onward progress the man had attained. At the top of the street, crossing over to their side now—their fate would soon be known.

Not a word was exchanged; only, as the sounds drew nearer, Mrs. Kirkland dropped her work and softly glided her hand between her husband's!

Nearer still.

Rap—rap! only two doors off.

Rap—rap! at the very next house.

Her impulse was to run down-stairs and seize the coveted treasure, which a naturally hopeful disposition made her feel was certainly awaiting her; but she dared not quit his side.

"You are trembling, my dearest, like a captured bird."

"It is for you, not me; I fear—I hope. Oh, if Uda were but here she would fly and

Digitized by Google

bring it up to us; Jane is always slow," she murmured incoherently.

One other far-drawn-out moment of suspense. What?—dying off in the distance, further and further away? Can it, indeed, be so? Alas! yes—he has passed them by. A blank post again for them.

Such a weary, harassed look lengthened out her face, which, spite of the disfiguring traces of care, and the lines and hollows poverty and sorrow had imprinted there, still retained traces of the great beauty of her earlier years. Such a mournful, stunned look in her eyes, as she turned them on her husband; but the heart-sickness of hope deferred, the keen pang of disappointment, is as strongly engraven on his countenance as on her own. "God's will be done!" His poor, colourless lips tremblingly shape the words; his eyes meeting hers, rivet them with one such long, long look of helpless, unutterable tenderness!

She breathed hard; her cheek grew very pale; she passed her hands distractedly over her brow, then wrung them in her wretchedness, for that look of his had gone like a sharp-edged dagger into her very heart's core. She had been told his days on earth were numbered, the precarious state in which he lay had been no secret kept from her knowledge. She was quite aware that the silver cord was already loosened, and the sand of his life nearly run out. She realised the doom of severance in the full intensity of its anguish, or rather believed she

Digitized by Google

did. She was little aware how strangely hope lingered on in her heart, how the dread decree had only been received as a painful spirit-breaking form of words, never as an unavertable conviction. It was only when that one peculiar expression rested on his face she recognised the terrible certainty; it was only when he fixed on her that look of earnest, touching affection, a look beautiful in its entireness, yet painful in the troubled sense of its inability to aid its chosen object, that she grasped the assurance of the early death, or sounded the full depth of the desolateness that lay before her—the lonely, bleak wilderness, in which, without him, her earthly future must be passed: her heart sank down overladen with its burden, bowed down beneath the weight of the cross given her to bear.

"Oh, Ermentrude! oh, sister!" she wailed forth, the words escaping her lips in one long, moaning sigh; and burying her head on his pillow, a few bitter tears welled forth.

"Judge her not hastily," he said, soothingly; "give her the highest charity required of us, and think no evil concerning her silence until proof assures us it has been without cause." She shook her head incredulously. "Any way, do not let poverty and sorrow be misapplied on us, by allowing them to harden our hearts; the poor and needy should ever be meek and lowly, not scornful, Anil." He mused awhile. "No woman could have passed by unheeded such a letter as I wrote to her;

Digitized by Google

no woman could set at naught a dying man's appeal; certainly not Ermentrude Sherburne. Yes, I will write again—I will write again," he hurriedly muttered.

"I wish with all my heart you had never written," she interrupted, with warmth.

"And why?"

"For years now our paths in life have run widely asunder; and it seems fate's decree that they should do so to the end. Poverty, sorrow, and tears have been my portion, and they have but closer knit together our hearts; wealth and joy have been the lot of Ermentrude. But gold and the world have proved fatal barriers between her and Love. I would not change with her. But, oh!" she passionately broke forth, "that it should be Ermentrude, of all others, to do this! Ermentrude, who once loved me so dearly! who stood by me when all others failed! who promised, come what might, she would be heart and hand my life-friend! Ermentrude to leave us to perish here, suppliants on the bounty of strangers, without one kind word, one gentle thought! O World! with all your pomps and vanities, that you, with your hollow friendships, your empty, miserable shows, can yet be powerful to take the place of love in a human heart! that you, and such as you, could come between me and my sister!" Her head sank despondently on her breast; she stood before him motionless, like a beautiful statue of Grief.

Roland wistfully watched her,—"You are

Digitized by Google

over-fatigued, dear; you have over-taxed your energies—body and mind. Uda will soon be here, then you must go and take some rest; without it you will never get through your task to-night."

"Have I frightened you with my foolish words? How thoughtless—how inconsiderate of me! but heart-distracted, spirit-wrung, still not for my own sake. Nay, I need no rest when work is before me; rest and thought only hinder me. Yet, to sing to-night bright, merry songs, and my heart so hot and weary within me!"

"A mocking farce, I grant you, Anil, with the sad tragedy daily enacting in your home."

"A gay, smiling face for the multitude, and a sad inner life, folded from view, beneath the seemingly lightsome spirit!" she said, with a cheerless smile. "Well, its aim be my support if the task be uncongenial. I must be ready for my work, and not waste time in chafing at destiny, in idle word complaining." She withdrew her hand, and crossing the room opened the little jingling piano that stood there, and began to sing.

With her, music was a passion; she possessed great natural talents, and in happier days her fine voice had been cultivated to the utmost. It was rare for an unprofessional person to sing like Anil Kirkland.

But on that evening there was a wild pathos, a heart-throb in the voice, that made it less pleasure than pain to hang upon those glorious

Digitized by Google

tones, thrillingly beautiful but so sufferingly mournful.

After awhile the door softly opened, and a child came in—a child without the elastic step of childhood, without the lively, careless look, befitting youth—with a sad, quiet expression on her face, and the slow, assured step of one acquainted with sorrow. Calmly she took the place Mrs. Kirkland had vacated; Roland nodding her a glad welcome, which brought forth a genial, loving smile in requital. Receiving no further notice, she curled herself up in the depths of her chair, fixing her eyes in an abstracted kind of way upon her mother. She was a strange-looking girl, a quaint, old-fashioned little thing, for one who had seen only eleven summers go by; though the look of premature old age on her face, and her unusual height, might at first sight cause her to be judged much older. Thin to lankiness, with long golden curls, deep blue eyes, and in marked contrast with her fair hair, dark-pencilled eyebrows, and long lashes, she was no beauty as children go. Poor little creature! she had been too early initiated into scenes of sorrow and privation, too soon made acquainted with the hard realities of life, to be engagingly dependent or winningly caressing as others of her age might be; but she was an intelligent, observing little body, and made herself very useful to her parents, with a sense far above her years. There she sat, looking thoughtfully out into the distance; something was evidently perplexing and working her

Digitized by Google

young mind. She moved restlessly, and at last, heaving a deep sigh,—

"I don't like mamma's song to-night," she whispered to Roland, in a low, troubled voice. "Why does she sing so strangely? it gives me pain here," touching her heart. "Ask her to stop; I don't like it."

A feeble pressure of the little hand folded over his own was the sole response her words elicited. They fell on very unheeding ears; whilst his wife, her heart rebelliously complaining, her spirit fretting against the neglect and bitterness of her doom, was passionately outpouring her feelings in song, whilst their child listened with awe and unconscious antagonism to the dirge-like strain in which the surging soul sighed forth its anguish and unrest. He was softly looking back to other days, whose memory her words had brought before him, in fancy standing by the grave of a green spring-like past, long laid to rest in a far-away grave, but which, as his thoughts concentrated themselves upon it, grew distinct again with life and poetry.

He was thinking of his youth and of hers; recalling what a fair gentle creature his Anil was when he had first wooed her for his own; how different to the rest of her proud family; how she had given up wealth and luxury, left father and mother, to cleave to him; of the flush of happiness that had overspread life during the first years of their union, the Paradise their home had been, and the heavy lot of struggling disappointment and hard experience they had both

Digitized by Google

been called upon to endure since then. And after that, his thoughts reverted to her elder sister; to Ermentrude, and her stately, queen-like beauty, and wilful impulsive character; and suddenly the harsh words his wife had spoken flashed back upon his mind, and jarred upon his musings. She who had so nobly upheld his drooping spirit, who had so patiently and meekly borne the sacrifice and cares his love had brought her, to falter? He had never heard her speak so cruelly before; was an adverse fate gaining the day, corroding her bright nature, and indurating her lowly, gentle heart?

Uda crept closer to him, and nestled her head upon his arm—cruel child! with her ideas solely limited to the present—this time effectually rousing him from his meditation.

"Why does mamma sing so? I don't like it. Ask her to stop," she persistently reiterated.

And now the reckless, unmeaning bravura Anil had been singing, suddenly changed into a simple touching English song, speaking of childhood, of home, of early love. The notes grew more plaintive and soft as the song went on; the clear, flexible voice, replete with feeling, swelled and died away, floating melodiously over the room.

"I like that better. Oh, I like that very, very much!" breathlessly whispered the child. Roland was too absorbed a listener to speak, the tension of his gaze upon his wife was startling in its engrossed fixedness.

The song was done; the last notes died tre-

Digitized by Google

mulously away; her face was calm with renovated hope and faith; the evil spirit had departed; music had comforted her wrung heart; David had come to Saul; her soul was refreshed and well.

She went up to her husband, and stood by his side; he looked so faint, she trembled to see him. She pushed the child away.

"I have been very cruel!" she murmured, in bitter self-reproach; "I have tried you sadly with my angry feelings and ungoverned words. Forgive me," she penitently whispered. A kiss sealed her pardon.

"Now, what answer, Uda?"

"Mrs. Vaughan had not time to write, mamma; but will send her carriage for you at seven o'clock."

"How kind she is, and how ungrateful am I! My heart should never fail me when Providence has so unexpectedly raised me up such a friend. What! six already striking by the church clock? Can it, indeed, be so late? I must go and array myself in my holiday garb; then, Roland, come back and make tea for you; next to my task. Oh, how I wish I could have you for my listener!"

"And in what do you deck yourself out to-night, Anil?"

"My evening wardrobe is limited to one muslin dress of simple white."

"Ay! wear it, dear, with blue ribbon; and you will look like the Anil Holford of other days. That was your dress the evening I first met you."



Digitized by Google

"A sorry representative, I fear."

She spoke gaily, but turned away abruptly; and before she reached the door her handkerchief was raised to her eyes.

As she left the room, Roland sank back exhausted on his couch. A sharp spasm of pain darted across his frame; his breath came and went in short, heavy coughs; a deadly paleness overspread his face.

"Do not call your mother, she has enough to try her," he gasped out; and he lay there senseless.

These fainting attacks were very frequent now. The child was accustomed to them, and used every restorative means, noiselessly and handily, as one of older experience.

He revived, and looked dreamily around him.

"You have not called your mother?" were his first-spoken words.

"No, no. But nothing further has occurred? Forgive me asking; but you are worse; and mamma was crying when she left the room. Oh, surely, no more grief! no more trouble!" she plaintively murmured.

Her question seemed to restore him to himself.

"We have been disappointed, Uda, where we trusted most," he answered, gravely.

Then, for a brief space, both were silent.

"Little girl!" he presently resumed, "when you grow to woman's estate, may God shield you from the doom of broken trust and shat-

Digitized by Google

tered faith, and avert from your lot the cruel changes of time in the heart you love strong as life—the shattering of the earthly trust you lean on, as you only should on Heaven! Nay, God forgive me," he broke off abruptly, "that I should speak my cruel experience to my child! And what am I, that I should rail against love and trust deceived? Uda, rather turn from these gloomy pages to the one bright picture that has illumined the dark book life has been to me. There, the record of an earthly love is engraven that has stood firm, strong as death, through good and ill report; through cold and heat, sunshine and storm; through the toilsome, thorny path, it has been our weary pilgrimage to tread together; and that love has been your mother's for me, Ermentrude!"

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER III.

HAVING philosophically traced back effects to their causes, and made the important discovery that the weariness and disgust with which all things contributed to inspire him originated in the extremely uninteresting circumstance that he wanted his dinner, we might naturally conclude that hunger appeased, the world would have been placed on a very different footing in the estimation of Basil, to the dull, profitless aspect it had previously assumed. But fortune was by no means kindly disposed towards him that evening.

Spite of the savoury messes set before him —and the culinary department of the Royal Oak was by no means despicable—spite of the comforts of the blazing fire and luxurious arm-chair, invitingly placed beside the hearth after dinner, Basil still remained moody and dissatisfied. His unaccountable restlessness annoyed him. Thought was wilful, and would follow out its own sensitively-active train. This became excitement at last; and still no solution presented itself as to what was so strangely stirring the hidden recesses of his heart.

In his state of mind he might have recog-

Digitized by Google

nised a prophetic warning; in the pertinacity with which old memories would intrude, the foreshadowing of some nearing event connected with their object—a whisper the soul is often allowed to breathe to man, an anticipating notice sent in mercy, almost invariably despised, or totally unheeded.

He had diligently spelt his copy of *The Times* through and through. His patience was well-nigh exhausted. He looked around in search of some refuge from himself. Books were ranged on a distant table. On examination, an old *Racing Calendar*, the *Complete Angler*, Taylor's *Holy Dying*, and a *Bradshaw*, were found to constitute the stock!

"I shall cut my throat with my penknife, or throw myself out of window, as the Frenchman did, *pour me délasser un peu*, if I stay here much longer, with my own charming self for sole companion," he soliloquised, as with many a wry face he turned the volumes over.

As a last resource he took up his hat, walked down-stairs, and out into the open air, to smoke. A piazza ran from the hotel door some way along the street. He sauntered slowly up and down it, tranquilly enjoying his cigar. Scarcely a creature was stirring. Hammerton—dull place—looked as dead by night as it had done by day. Myriads of stars were thickly gemming the frosty sky, but he never paused to look upon them: their contemplation was always painful to him now; they recalled a plighted troth pledged beneath them.

Digitized by Google

On just such a night—a cold, glittering, winter's night—long ago, he had parted from the love of his youth, never to meet her again. She was another's now.

A loud laugh disturbed his meditations, as he was repassing the hotel. A knot of young men, whom he had noticed in the bar as he went out, were now congregated at the door, apparently in a very jocose, lively state of mind. He drew back into the shadow, and let them go by. They all passed on but two, who took possession of his walk, and, arm-in-arm, strolled up and down it. He continued to stand apart. The lamps were lighted in the streets, and glimmered and twinkled over the town.

Basil abstractedly watched them with the seeming interest of a child. Suddenly a carriage turned the corner of the street. Another and another succeeded it. Hammerton was waking up into life at last. The two companions stayed their steps near him, and began descanting on the equipages and their owners—all Hammerton gossip and local allusions. From their conversation he gleaned a concert was the attraction of the evening. It was a bore playing eavesdropper, and an equal bore moving away. One of the men left at last. Basil heartily wished the other would do likewise, and leave him in peaceful possession of the spot; but his unknown companion was more sociably inclined.

"Fine night, sir!" he remarked, as Mr. Rutherford advanced a few paces, with the full intention of escaping from his vicinity.

Digitized by Google

"Very!" was the laconic reply.

"But cold," persevered the little man.

"Rather fresh, certainly."

"Wind in the east—neither good for man nor beast — been so all day — disagreeable month March—very!" persevered his new friend, in spasmodic jerks.

To all of which incontrovertible truths Basil acquiesced by an assenting bow.

"Stranger to Hammerton, I presume, sir?" asked the little man, carelessly eying Mr. Rutherford from head to foot.

Basil turned sharply round, half disposed to be affronted; but there was something so irresistibly winning in the merry face that met his provoked gaze, in the inquisitive turned-up nose and twinkling eye, such self-satisfaction in the free-and-easy air, it was impossible to mind anything their owner said.

"Ah! I was sure of it, the moment I saw you. Thought I knew every body and every thing belonging to Hammerton. Excuse me, sir—been here long? Going to stay any time, hey—hey?"

Each question enforced by a severe rap on the lid of a very large snuff-box, just produced from his pocket.

"If you must know all about me, I came to Hammerton a few hours ago, and purpose leaving it as early as I can to-morrow morning," replied Basil, laughing against his will. "And since you appear so kindly interested in my movements, perhaps you might further care to

Digitized by Google

hear that, missing a train I wished to catch owing to an accident on the journey, was the simple cause of my visit to this remarkably lively locality."

"Came to-day and going to-morrow—ho! And find Hammerton dull—ha! Not very taking at first sight, maybe; but a quaint old town, worth exploring, I can tell you, sir. Hurried visit, though, and no time to see the lions. Take a pinch?" offering the brobdignag box.

The offer was declined.

"So much the better! Glad to see it! Not that I grudge it you; but bad habit! Bad habit — very! Excuse my questions, sir; thought you might be come to look at Boulton Lodge or Clare Hall."

Basil stared at the talkative little man, and began to entertain serious doubts of his sanity.

"Two nice places to be let in the neighbourhood, if ever you want anything in that way. Ha, likely to be a good concert!" he broke off, as another carriage passed them. "By the by, what are you doing here?—ought to be at it. Going to it, perhaps, though—hey, sir?"

"Do you really ever attempt such ambitious things in this out-of-the-way place?" drawled Basil, wearily.

"Attempt such things! God bless me, sir!" exclaimed the excited little man, bristling up at the disparaging tone in which his native town was mentioned. "Why not, pray? Do you think we are living at the North Pole, or that

Digitized by Google

all the inhabitants of Hammerton are owls in the desert? Hammerton, let me tell you, sir, is remarkable for its musical talent — *re*-markable! At this very moment an Amateur Concert of vocal and instrumental music is taking place, given by the 'Harmoniously-United Club of Melodious Fellows,' with which you might challenge England to compete," pompously announced the little man.

"The misfortune is my ignorance, but I regret to say their illustrious names have never penetrated into my limited sphere," remarked Basil, now roused from apathy into amusement.

"Ah, there it is!" said the little man, with another startling tap on the snuff-box; "there it is! The moment a person gets out of his own '*limited* sphere' he believes himself to be in the back settlements. Sir, if the President of the Harmoniously-United Club of Melodious Fellows was to be detained a night in your native town, he would consider himself quite as much out of the world as you think yourself to be here! Lord bless you, sir! the world is just like a Christmas-pie, and every grown-up child who gets a slice retires into his corner, like Jack in the nursery song, to pull out and gloat over his special plum, and chant his own praises as the A 1 good boy!"

"Rather a far-fetched idea," said Basil, "but with some truth in it. And do these harmonious melodists often enchant the Hammertonian ears with such vocal and instrumental treats?"

"Like to-night? No, sir. The 'United'

Digitized by Google

often have musical meetings in a quiet way; but only once a-year a public concert. This one is an uncommon meeting; expected to be unusually well attended. Like to see a programme, maybe? — have one in my pocket; patronised by all the first families, as you may see by the names: the proceeds being for a charitable purpose. Interesting case — very."

"For the benefit of Mrs. Kirkland," read Basil. "Two instrumental pieces and five songs allotted to her share, — a dearly-earned benefit, poor woman!"

"Ah!" sighed the little man, "sad case — sad case — very."

"Some second-rate professional singer," resumed Basil — it amused him to anger the little man — "brought here to shine as star at this *réunion* of native provincial talent."

"Beautiful singer — fine player," answered his companion, with sudden gravity. "Not a professional — has evidently seen better days — a sick husband — hopeless case — dying of a deep decline — I attend him professionally. Very sad, very sad, indeed — poverty-stricken — friendless. Mrs. K. quite the lady; gives music-lessons in the town — teaches in the families of several of the 'United' — kind-hearted men; got up this concert to bring her into notice, with a view to further employment. Lady not agreeable at first, but came round — forced to it, poor thing; never can tell what one may come to, never — no — never," he said, contemplatively, indulging in a very prolonged pinch of snuff, and

Digitized by Google

with many an ominous shake of the head. After which the worthy apothecary proceeded to detail, for Basil's edification, what little he knew concerning Anil and her sick husband, waxing very eloquent with his subject, gradually securing his hearer's interest in them.

"Go to the concert now, sir?" he asked, with quaint earnestness, in conclusion. "Tickets very cheap, and every mite helps—every grain adds grist to the mill."

"'A family dinner, home-made wine, and an amateur concert,' three things of which some old saying bids us specially beware," provokingly observed Basil. "You should set me a better example."

"Humph!—shall look in presently—have taken a ticket—but a professional visit to pay at nine—and, between ourselves, shall have quite enough of it there. Not over-partial to your grand Italian music and dismal ditties; 'St. Patrick's Day in the Morning,' or 'Drops of Brandy,' more to my liking: plenty of the dismals in real life without setting them to music. Time's up now" (referring to his watch)—"must not keep a lady waiting. I have the honour of wishing you a very good evening, sir."

Half-an-hour later Basil entered the gay crowded concert-room.

The performance had begun some time,—the first sound that greeted him was the voice of one of the "United Melodists" regaling the assembled company with "'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay," delivered theatrically, interspersed with

Digitized by Google

many roulades and adornments of his own, and in most stentorian tones.

"A very unnecessary, overstrained requirement of 'Duty,'" muttered Basil, with a strong inclination to stop his ears, as, with a low inclination, the large-voiced man, amidst thunders of applause, bowed himself off the platform.

A long instrumental piece followed, during which Basil yawned in a manner truly alarming to behold. The next on the list was "L'Addio," by Schubert. Half asleep, Basil paid no heed that it was allotted to Mrs. Kirkland.

Led on by one of the stewards, Anil advanced to the front of the platform. The prelude was played; the clear, bell-like voice took up the strain, so soft, so touching in tone, he looked up in amazement that anything so perfect could be found in Hammerton.

In her unpretending white dress and blue ribbons, perfectly self-possessed, with her steadfast mien and calm sad eyes, Anil looked winningly lovely. But admiration was not the expression on Basil's face; the dark hue that overcast his countenance as he looked on her more resembled the shadow that falls from the wings of the angel of death on the face of the dying than the tint of a living being, — anguish, surprise, blended with the crushed wretchedness of a wounded spirit, were visibly imprinted there. With his face hidden in his hands, that beautiful voice warbling on until it well-nigh maddened him, Basil remained until the song was concluded. He was barely conscious of the rap-

Digitized by Google

turous *encore*, of the renewed plaudits when she had sung it again. The room grew suffocatingly hot—he could bear it no longer; and, pushing through the crowd, he made his way out of the hall. Wandering on aimlessly, whither he cared not, never staying his steps until he had left the town far behind him, he walked on until he reached a bridge crossing a little stream; leaning over it, he watched the course of the restless waters gleaming in the moonlight. He took off his hat; the cold night-breeze fanned his brow; the gurgling of the brook soothed his restless spirit.

Anil Holford, in poverty, in distress, singing to the public for charity! He had lost sight of her for so many years, but, amidst all the chances and changes of fate, that a Holford could ever become so lowered in means and station as she! He knew she had married against her father's wishes, but nothing more; for, shortly after the event, circumstances had made him desire that the name of Holford might never be mentioned before him. He had sternly put all concerning them from his knowledge. Where was their pride, that they could allow her to be thus reduced to penury, if no better motive interfered to prevent it? The little petted child he remembered some fifteen years ago, when he had left England for India, to have changed into the care-encumbered woman, catering for the amusement of the crowd! with a wrung, anxious heart, singing sad songs, that only seemed mockery compared with her own

Digitized by Google

reality of sorrow and woeful tale! He had the means, he would rescue her—that should be his revenge.

But then, again—and once more his head drooped low over the water—why revive the source of his own blighted existence? he was enjoying life now; by a strong effort of will he had resolutely put all thoughts of the past away, and after the lapse of years was a grief, in which he had long believed no germ of life remained, to come back to disturb his peace of mind, and that self-sought? No! Ermentrude and all concerning her were as the dead to him now, and should continue so. He mused a little space, then bent his steps homewards; singing—yes, actually singing fragmentary snatches of gay songs! and hard thoughts were in Basil's heart when, that night, he laid his head upon his pillow.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER IV.

Some thirty years before the date of the commencement of this tale, the owner of Brereton Hall fell ill, and sent for a lawyer to make his will. An eccentric elderly bachelor, having large possessions, but, with the exception of a simple-minded spinster sister of his own standing, no near kith or kin. When he meditated setting his house in order, Mr. Brereton found it no easy matter to decide upon his successor.

"Sue has no head for business, and will never be able to manage the property; she will get things in a nice mess before she has done with it, I know: but I suppose, poor thing, I must pay her the compliment of letting her have the place for her life, or she will consider herself illused—maybe try and prove a case of *non compos mentis* against me—who knows? Women are never to be depended on, and are always greedy of money and power," was his ungallant and preliminary remark.

Accordingly he gave his directions: and strictly entailing the Brereton estates, and all his worldly goods, he bequeathed them first to the spinster sister; after her death successively to

Digitized by Google

devolve on three distant cousins; and in case of failure of a direct male heir to any of these, then to go to an old friend of the name of Staunton.

"There is no one else you would like put in?" asked the lawyer, biting the top of his pen.

"I think not. I have given a chance to five —that is surely sufficiently doing my duty by the next generation? It has been no small tax to the imagination of a lonely old fellow to rout out as many as I have done. Landed property is a great plague as one grows old. I wish them joy of its cares and responsibilities; a very few feet of ground will shortly suffice my wants. Let me see: sister Sue, cousin Tom and his two sons, Ben and Stephen, and Frank Staunton. Jolly old boy, I should like him to have it, and would leave it him altogether; but then the world would magnify the others into victims, and disturb me in the grave with the claims of kindred and accusations of unfairness, which would be an unpleasant appendage to one's memory." He mused awhile. "Well, on second thoughts, you may make up the half-dozen, and put in Dr. Dolittle; he has been very attentive, and patched me up wonderfully. Not much chance, however, of my mark of gratitude ever being of any use to him; still I shall have done the civil thing by him, and he can look up in the world on expectancy!" said Mr. Brereton, with a dry chuckle.

"There is no saying," observed the lawyer,

Digitized by Google

reflectively; "the ups and downs of life are not to be depended upon."

"And it may please Fortune, you think, to make old Dolittle master of Brereton? Well, old Dolittle's a good fellow enough himself, but Dolittle's son is a scamp, and will come to an untimely end; and all their connexions are decidedly nobodies. His successor might not be exactly the man for Brereton. Let me see, who else is there? I stood godfather to that boy of Rutherford's the other day; put him in after Dolittle, and let everything go to him without limitation of any kind. Standing seventh in an entail, it will be a long time before he steps into my old shoes; so he may make ducks and drakes of it all, if it pleases him, *when* he gets it!"

"Seven is a lucky number," said the lawyer, with a facetious simper.

"A lucky number, eh? Seven's the main!" echoed Mr. Brereton; and seven proved a very lucky number to Basil Rutherford.

Mr. Brereton recovered from his indisposition, and survived the making of his will some years. The spinster sister duly succeeded him, and proved tough. It is said, there is no preservative of life equal to being the one in possession of an entailed property. She outlived Cousin Tom and "jolly Frank Staunton." After her decease Brereton changed owners very rapidly. Stephen and Ben both died in the prime of life; the one meeting his death on the battle-field, the other from natural causes. Doctor Dolittle reigned there as lord and master but seven short years,



Digitized by Google

when he, too, was called upon to pay the debt of nature—a victim to the good dinners and well-filled cellars which so late in life had fallen to his lot. So, at the age of thirty-two, Basil Rutherford, then in India, a lieutenant in the Company's service, by one of those strange freaks of fortune to be occasionally met with in real life, as well as in the pages of the novelist, suddenly found himself master of Brereton, and in the enjoyment of ten thousand a-year. He did not return to England for some little time afterwards; then reluctantly, and because his presence could not be dispensed with, and the property was going to the bad for want of his superintendence. He had now been settled at Brereton for two years; and having once got over the pain of coming back with the early glory of his life departed from him, he liked it better than India, and found time slip quickly and usefully through his hands in a well-employed, well-spent life. He was a serviceable man in his generation, though people considered him a hard and cold one, and said, "Prosperity had puffed him up and made him stiff and stern to his kind—so unlike the frank, open-hearted boy they remembered in other days." "Judge not, that ye be not judged," looking well beneath the surface before presuming to decide on the cause of the soul-change noticeable in others.

"Summer is when we love and are beloved;
Some miss that season——and yet
The year wears round with all, as best it may."

Digitized by Google

It is not every one who has the means bestowed to lay in a stock of fuel to make the hearth of the winter of a life so warm and bright with the reflection of happiness, until it thoroughly compensates for the genuine glow and beauty of summer, causing its gone-by charm and freshness to be unrecked-of any longer, unwished-for any more, lost in the repose and calm enjoyment of that after-season of cheery compensation, obliterating all but a tender remembrance of the vanished day. With Basil it had not proved so.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER V.

The clear, cold March afternoon, was fading into twilight. Already the library at Brereton Hall was growing dusky and indistinct with the gathering shadows; but in one of the deep embayed windows a lady was still bending over her workframe, intent upon her employment, unheeding the waning light.

She was a gentle, diffident-looking little woman, no longer in her first youth, and if she had ever had any beauty of which to boast, with no traces of it remaining; but there was something in the pale calm face which, if you paused to study it, made you fancy you might read a past-by history there: still, its expression of tranquil contentment could only lead to the further belief that its owner must be the possessor of a very quiet heart. "Thou shalt keep them in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on Thee," was always the thought that rose uppermost in my mind whenever I saw Sybil Rutherford.

At some distance from her a young girl, sitting on the rug, was alternately engaged in turning over the pages of a book of prints and tormenting a large cat, who, cosily coiled up into

Digitized by Google

a ball, was endeavouring to get out of her reach, and enjoy undisturbed the luxurious warmth of the wood fire, before which it was basking. This little girl was about thirteen years of age, and strangely handsome; her beauty, however, bidding fair in the future to be more commanding than attractive in character. Hers was a face of perfect feature and brilliant colouring; but self-will and haughtiness were already stamped in all its lines, and the disdainful, restless flash in the fine dark eyes, betrayed petulance and a warm, quick imagination.

"Aunt Sybil."

"Yes, my dear."

"I am tired of sitting here by myself, and Pussy is cross, and very bad company; when are you coming to talk to me?" she asked, impatiently shaking back her long dark curls.

"Directly, Gracie," answered the cheery voice; "but you know I do not share your love of sitting with my hands idle before me."

"Oh! but then your life is one long holiday-time, Auntie; so you do not require rest, as I do."

"Had I been asked, I should have reversed the description."

"One hour before breakfast, three afterwards, and two in the afternoon, six days out of the seven, is severe employment of time, methinks, Aunt Sybil; it is great wear and tear to the mind, I can assure you."

"Poor, hard-worked little girl!" said Sybil, with mock compassion.

Digitized by Google

"Now you are laughing at me. I don't like being laughed at. You never *will* feel for me, Auntie; — but how should you, when all day long you have nothing to do but work at your frame, and read amusing books, and garden when it suits you? your hardest work to order dinner every day, and look over household accounts once a-week: but that is not much."

"We say nothing of visiting the poor, and managing village-clubs and schools."

"Training up the young idea when it suits you, and playing Lady Bountiful in the village to an admiring audience!"

"No small task of time and patience if you do the work systematically, Gracie."

"Maybe; but all the same voluntarily."

"Then the wardship of a troublesome, idle little girl, and the endeavour to the utmost of honestly managing an out-of-order, embarrassed estate, to the best advantage for her."

"Ah, that, to be sure, goes for something: but, then, to be connected in anyway with Holford surely repays you, Aunt Sybil?" she said, proudly; "not to speak of the pleasure it must give you to have the troublesome, idle little girl always with you," she archly added.

"After a fashion, perhaps it does, Gracie."

"Of course it must," said Grace, laughing; "whilst the education of that promising young lady does anything but repay *me* — all work and no play; and you know the effect of that system on overworked people, Auntie; so please come

Digitized by Google

to my rescue, I have a hundred different things to say to you . . . ."

"Well, if you will not come readily, you must by compulsion," cried Grace, impulsively springing from her seat, and running up to Miss Rutherford. "Now, then, I put by this old parrot, who must wait for his dinner until to-morrow; it will be all for the benefit of that curious bunch of grey-green grapes, the like of which were never seen in this world since the flood, Auntie. And I put by thimble, scissors, and so forth, very neatly in your workbox; and I lead you across the room, and settle you in that easy chair, and sit down at your feet. And now you may lecture me, or preach to me, or praise me, as you will, provided always you talk to me."

"Conceited little chatterbox!" exclaimed another voice near them.

"Mr. Rutherford!" cried Grace, with astonishment, standing up, with anything but delight depicted on her countenance. "Oh, those nasty screens!"

"Just in time to rescue me from being quite annihilated by this vigorous young lady, Basil," said Sybil, as her brother, coming forward from behind the large screen placed by the door to ward off the draught, clasped her in his arms; but he only shook hands with Grace, and the contrast of his greeting of the two was very marked.

"It is such pleasure to see you, and it was growing so late I was half afraid you would disappoint us again to-night," continued Sybil.

Digitized by Google

"How you spoil that child, Sybil! Thank you, one night spent at Hammerton was quite enough in a lifetime, I can assure you. Of course you received the telegram I sent you yesterday?"

"Yes; and have been reading an account of the accident in to-day's paper. What a mercy it was not more serious in result than merely detaining you!" answered his sister, looking fondly away from him to her disappointed young charge.

"There was some cause for apprehension, certainly," he absently replied, as he took up some letters which had come for him by that day's post, and began examining their contents. A chill seemed to have fallen over the room.

"You are not looking any the better for your trip," remarked Sybil, affectionately.

He brushed his hair off his forehead, glancing carelessly at himself in the glass over the mantelpiece.

"Rather tired and wild-looking, it strikes me, Sybil. Sleep was not propitious last night, and inns, at the best, are very comfortless places. Are they not going to bring candles? This room is darkness visible."

"Grace, my dear, it must be your tea-time," said Sybil, as she rang the bell for lights. "You had better go to the school-room, or you will be keeping Miss Wallis waiting for you."

Basil looked relieved as the child unwillingly withdrew.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER VI.

He had been sitting for a good half hour without uttering a word, thrown far back in his chair, his long legs stretched out to their furthest extent, his arms hanging listlessly down, his eyes fixed on one flower on the carpet, the personification of Abstraction.

Her notice attracted by his continued thoughtfulness, Sybil bestowed many a furtive, anxious glance on him over the pages of her book, but he never heeded them.

"Something is troubling your mind, I am positive, Basil!" remarked Miss Rutherford, breaking at last the long silence which had been maintained betwixt them. "Is it anything in which I can help you? it goes to my heart to see you looking so perplexed and unhappy."

"There are not many thoughts of mine ever long hidden from you, Sybil," he said, raising his head suddenly from the object of his contemplation. "Something *has* happened to me—a positive bit of adventure: imagine that in these prosaic days! I have been puzzling my sapient brains a long while how best to introduce the subject, so as to impart it easily to you; and

Digitized by Google

now, after all my pains, to stumble it out in this awkward manner! Well, it cannot be helped. So, to cut the matter short, who do you think, by some wickedly perverse dispensation of my luckless destiny, I unexpectedly came across at Hammerton? I may as lief tell you, for you will never guess. In that out-of-the-way locality, Sybil," he went on deliberately, "as if it were my hopeless doom never to be left in peace, never effectually to lay that troubled ghost in a quiet grave, I met .... who do you think I met? —I should like to have your ideas on the subject, my sister."

"Not,"—she hesitated,—"no, that could not be—not ——"

"You pause, Sybil—say the words boldly! —they will not break my heart to hear them. Not Ermentrude Sherburne," he said, bitterly: "there is room enough in this world for her and me to steer apart; not Ermentrude—womanly pattern of unswerving constancy and truth! but the next thing to it—her sister, Mrs. Kirkland."

"Anil! my own dear little Anil!—have you really seen her?—what unexpected happiness! Oh, Basil, I do, indeed, envy you! And how was she looking? where did you meet? quickly tell me all about it!" cried Sybil, in one breath. "After losing sight of Anil Holford so long, at length to hear tidings of her—only think of it!" she went rambling on, quite beside herself with joy.

"Aye, only think of it!—and of Anil Holford!

Digitized by Google

The ups and downs of life are queer things sometimes, Sybil. Where do you think I found her? —how occupied when first I saw her?"

"How should I know? I dare say in a pleasant little home of her own, a happy wife and joyful mother; her means limited, I fear, but her wants few. She was the only one of the Holfords who ever had a taste for quiet, domestic life, and was capable of centering her ambition on her own fireside."

"That engaging *protégée* of yours bids fair to share the many attractive qualities for which the stiff-necked predecessors of her house are so distinguished," mischievously remarked Mr. Rutherford; "in her, Holford of Holford lives over again, in undiminished pride and perversity."

"Poor Gracie! she resembles her poor father far more than her grandfather," sighed Sybil; "prejudice makes you very hard on her. But I can think of nothing just now, apart from this unexpected news of Anil!"

"Dwelling in such a happy home, lovely and beloved, bright with flowers, and joyous with prosperity? A pretty picture, Sybil, but of your own creating. Shall we reverse it?—a cruel thing to do. Truth *is* often cruel. What think you of Anil Holford, poor, unhappy, and friendless; with a helpless husband sick unto death, dependent for support on her exertions, a young child to bring up, and she toiling unaided against the adverse tide, giving music-lessons for a bare pittance to the children of tradespeople, and singing in a public concert-room for

Digitized by Google

the entertainment and dilettante charity of an idle crowd?"

"You are conjuring up this dismal story to impose upon me—I cannot, I will not believe it!"

"Nevertheless, I saw it with my eyes and heard it with my ears."

"My poor, poor Anil! if this had been known, how many would have gladly helped you!" said Sybil, wiping her eyes.

"'So very many!' A sister, for instance, to whom the world gives credit for possessing almost fabulous wealth; a niece, heiress to a fair property and comfortable income. It must be soothing to Mrs. Sherburne's warm heart, as she lays her head on her pillow of down and passes her days in affluence, to think on her sister's poverty and her dying brother-in-law lacking the common necessaries of life. 'So very many!' There was once a hare, Sybil, who possessed so many friends (I heard you telling the fable to Grace not long ago), yet, when the day of adversity came, they with one accord all made excuse, and declined to help her. Why, it is enough to raise old Holford from the grave when such things are happening to one of his children!" Basil said, as he vigorously broke up the coals on the fire into little bits with the poker.

"You must acquit both sister and niece of wilfully allowing this; from her wedding-day, Anil has been an ignored being in her own family."

"The once tender sister, then, threw her special darling overboard with the rest, in obedience

Digitized by Google

to paternal commands? What a model of dutiful submission Mrs. Sherburne proved herself!—first sister, and then lover! She is reaping the prize of her good deeds now—happy creature! How, in former years, she used to hate Ralph Sherburne!"

"Basil, dear, please not to talk so recklessly; I never heard you go on in this strain before."

"You never heard me allude to the subject at all before, save once, briefly in a letter: written words are easily controlled."

"I am thankful it has been so, if you can speak no otherwise than thus regarding her."

"How would you have me speak? soothingly, laudatingly, of the girl false to her freely-given troth-plight, one short year and a half after it was spoken? of the wealthy woman who leaves her motherless, needy sister, to perish of want? of the hard, worldly nature, which trampled on all tender feelings to secure wealth and power? Nay, it would be very hard for *me* to speak well of Ermentrude Sherburne!"

"Ermentrude is not happy; you are amply avenged, Basil," said Sybil, slowly.

"So I have heard, but scarcely credit it. I do also see the wicked in such prosperity. But the subject is at all times unpleasing to me, and we will not talk of her."

"Only first acquit Mrs. Sherburne of knowing Anil's poverty."

"I acquit Grace, for you have taught her better; but not Mrs. Sherburne. I know for a

Digitized by Google

fact, that twice Mr. Kirkland has lately written to her, and that not one line in reply has been received."

"She never received his letters," said Sybil, decidedly.

"Letters sent by post rarely fail to reach their destination."

"Ralph Sherburne, then, has intercepted them."

"Would he?—dare he?—and to Ermentrude?" muttered Basil between his set teeth, with a strange fierce light glittering in his eyes.

"He would do anything to keep the sisters apart. He dares do anything hard or cruel with Ermentrude."

"She married him!" he said composedly, and he sank back in his chair.

"She has reaped a bitter harvest of her own sowing. There never lived a greater or more jealous tyrant than Ralph Sherburne. He is quite aware she never cared for him, and revenges himself accordingly with all the petty malice and spite of which such a character is capable."

Basil smiled a bitter smile.

"She married him!" he quietly repeated.

"She did; but why, has always been a mystery to me. She refused him more than once; and within a very short time of her acceptance of him was true to her old feelings of aversion to him and love to you. I never could fathom the cause of the sudden change in her views: it happened at the time when circumstances forced me to see so little of them."

Digitized by Google

"Poor Sybil!"

"It was all for the best," she said hurriedly. "I have long learnt to realise that, of whatever has befallen me. Better entirely to lose, whilst the belief and trust in our ideal is fresh and unmarred, than to live on, be disappointed, and find we have loved amiss. Now, tell me more of Anil: how astonished you must both have been to meet!"

"I have told you all I know concerning her. A queer sort of little man I met with in my travels persuaded me to go to the concert, where I found her singing. From him I heard something of her history, but without having an idea who she was."

"Well! and what happened?"

"Accordingly, I went to this feast of music, heard her sing, and then, like a fool for my pains, ran away, and walked about for an hour or two, to calm the excitement the sight of her well-remembered face and the throng of recollections it called up had raised in my breast."

"And then?"

"Then I returned home, went to bed, and, like a sensible man, had a good night's rest."

"That I am sure you did not: you told me just now you could not sleep at all."

"I did, though; and never more thoroughly enjoyed the oblivion into which slumber threw me. Next morning, after eating a remarkably good breakfast, I turned my face homewards."

"Oh, Basil!"

"I wonder how often you have said, 'Oh,

Digitized by Google

Basil!' in those reproachful accents to-night, Sybil?"

"Because I feel assured you did nothing of the kind: you may have had a good night's rest, and eaten a good breakfast, no reason existing why you should not, but afterwards you hastened to find out Anil, and, like the good Samaritan, poured the wine and oil of sympathy into her wounded heart, and left substantial proofs of willing aid behind you."

"Rather, like the Levite, I gathered my robes round me, and passed her by on the other side. Do not shake your head, Sybil—I did."

"I know you better."

"Don't be too sure of that. I own the subject sat uneasily on my soul; in plain English, the thought of leaving them to starve prevented my breakfast comfortably digesting: but I had no wish to see any Holford face to face again, so finally I determined to go home and consult you how best to relieve their wants. Accordingly I started to walk to the station. On my way thither I met a curious sort of little girl, half child, half woman in her ways. I had caught sight of the little elf once before during my brief stay in Hammerton, and had been struck with her resemblance to the family. This odd specimen of childhood was wistfully eyeing a bunch of Portugal grapes in a grocer's window, and as I paused more closely to observe her, she held up a tiny basket of odds and ends—a sort of thing like the poor's basket Mrs. Lee occasionally sends you to purchase from, Sybil! She asked

Digitized by Google

me to take something, and finding on inquiry the proceeds were not intended to buy flannel petticoats for negroes, or muslin dresses for the inhabitants of the Polar regions, I generously invested half-a-crown in purchasing her stock-in-trade, and then asked her what she meant to do with it."

"She meant to buy some grapes."

"Greedy little girl!" said I.

"They were for her father, who was very ill."

"I guessed then who she was: I had my suspicions before. 'What is your name?' I asked. 'I am called Uda,' she answered; 'but my real name is a very long one—Ermentrude Anil Kirkland.'"

"I suppose I looked very grave and severe: it *was* a shock to me, Sybil, though I knew exactly what was coming; but somehow, hearing the name—and she is so like her——" He stopped abruptly.

"And this was Anil's child?" asked Sybil, kindly.

"Just so; and, to make a long story short, owing to these presumed ungracious looks of mine she began to cry. After I had exhausted every nursery rhyme I could think of in my efforts to console her, and had sung 'Hush-a-by, baby, upon the tree top'—at which, strange to say, she only cried the more—and was in the midst of 'Bye, baby, bunting,' a great, tall boy rushed to the rescue, looking as if he would very much have liked to eat me up, if his mouth had been wide enough. And after soothing the



Digitized by Google

little lady, and sharply inquiring my business, a mutual explanation ensued, when he became more pacified, and began to lecture her for selling wares in the street, and addressing a stranger. To which her sole pleaded excuse was, that she wanted money to buy grapes for her father."

"And then you bought the grapes, and went with her to see her father?"

"How you persist in jumping at conclusions! I bought the grapes, of course; but I never went near her father. I found out what I could about him from Master John, as she called her companion, who, after I had revealed to him that I had been an old friend of Mrs. Kirkland's in former years, grew communicative. I suppose there must be something ingenuous in my appearance—hey, Sybil?—for he implicitly believed all I said. The substance of his communication amounted to this—that his mother, Mrs. Sylvester Vaughan, (such a name!) had, by some means or other, become acquainted with the circumstances of the family, and was doing all she could for them; but being only the widow of a clergyman with a limited income, that was not much beyond disposing of any little articles of needlework Anil and her child could execute for sale. Further, he said, their need was very great. I asked him if they had no friends of their own to whom they could apply for succour? He knew nothing of their connexions or antecedents; they had only come to Hammerton the previous autumn, and were very reserved on all points concerning themselves: but the child

Digitized by Google

had told him her father had written to a sister of his wife's, and was very unhappy because she would not answer his letters. After awhile we parted, very good friends now; the little girl happy with her grapes, escorted by Master John, who, by the way, is a fine, manly-looking young fellow."

"And after hearing all this, you actually never went near them?"

"Not I! For some time I walked about considering the *pros* and *cons* of the case, in all their different bearings—made out from the people of the inn my little doctor's name and address—called at his house—found him at home—received a corroboration of Master John's statement—and feigning to be a stranger moved by their case, without revealing my name, left with him a sealed-up packet of money to give them, when next he visited Mr. Kirkland. All this took time, Sybil, and made me miss the early train; but at last I got away, and returned as fast as steam could carry me to you and Brereton."

"Very much ashamed of yourself for your hard-heartedness and timidity in action; or, at all events, you ought to be so. However, we will do our best to retrieve your proceedings. To-morrow morning I will go myself to Hammerton," said Sybil, energetically; "leaving Grace under your charge." (Basil expressed the strong sense of dissatisfaction this part of the arrangement gave him, by making divers curious wry faces.) "Nay, you deserve it, as punishment for not having forestalled my intentions. Arrived at

Digitized by Google

Hammerton, I shall seek Anil out, hear her sad story from her own lips, learn all about this appeal to Ermentrude, and if I find the letter still unnoticed, then take up the matter, and act as shall seem best to my judgment for the interest of all parties, when I know the truth of their exact position towards each other."

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER VII.

GLORYING in their ancient lineage and in ancestral possessions, handed down to them century after century in unbroken succession, Holford of Holford, proprietor of that and six other baronies at the time of the Domesday survey, their devotion completely absorbed on such-like unsubstantial objects, the father and mother of Anil Kirkland had never been loving or partial parents, and were more proud than fond of their offspring.

They were three in number: a son, Warin; and two daughters, Ermentrude and Anilla.

Strangely *rococo* names, certainly, had been given them at the baptismal font. They were all to be found often repeated in the family pedigree; and therefore were, of course, deemed worthy to be preferred before any more familiar, commonplace appellations!

Mr. Holford stood far too much apart in proud aloofness, setting his face like a flint against the near approach of every other human being to ensure or even appreciate domestic happiness; and his wife strove her best, as far

Digitized by Google

as a naturally kind heart would permit, to tread in his footsteps. She had wretched health, but that was not surprising, considering the life she led; daily companionship with Mr. Holford being in itself unrest, and a mere apology for existence in all its rich fulness and capacity. The cares of the world, and the straining after means to maintain his position in the former high estate of his ancestors, had tended much to sour Mr. Holford's temper; and though in his own singular way he may have been attached to his wife, the love, if rightly analysed, would have been proved to be far more vicarial than rectorial, an emanation from his own egotism, because, *as* his wife, she belonged to him, than an unselfish affection for her own sake; at all events, he laid himself open to this imputation, from the manner in which he ever demanded her sole and undivided attention, giving her in return but little companionship, and never being any comfort or support to her.

So their days passed on. In a solemn state of self-glorification, in an imperfect, inconsistent attempt at grandeur, they dwelt at Holford Manor-house, that whited sepulchre of the faded greatness of the family, of little use to the world at large, except as thorns in the flesh to their fellow-creatures from their excessive pride, and not of much more service to one another; the younger members of the family caged up in wearisome thraldom.

Brought up beneath the sway of these unwinning influences, what other result could be

Digitized by Google

anticipated to such training than that which actually ensued?

The children grew up proud, headstrong—a law unto themselves. Strength of will and determined energy were peculiar characteristics of the race of Holford. Unregulated, these great qualities degenerated into fatal faults, and became the bane of their possessors.

Though an only son, Warin had never been a favourite with his father. The causeless antipathy of the parent alienated the affections of the boy in childhood; and as Warin grew to man's estate, the uncongeniality between them mutually increased. He was sent to one of the German Universities to complete his education; when once more he returned to Holford, the feud between father and son was reawakened with redoubled vigour.

He was a fiery-spirited youth, open-natured, and endowed with strong passions and warm impulses, little under control; thwarted on every occasion, alike in great things as in small, for a while he uncomplainingly bore all the darts of petty rancour and dislike to which he was exposed; then, goaded to rebellion, kicked hard against the pricks, but vainly. Allowed to enter no profession, his home made odious, he spent as much of his time as was practicable under the hospitable roof of Mr. Sherburne, his mother's brother, where a cordial welcome always awaited him.

There he first met, and finally fell deeply in love, with Sybil Rutherford. The attachment

Digitized by Google

was mutual; but Sybil was only the daughter of a country lawyer—a worthy man, esteemed by all who knew him, and of respectable family, but having no ancestry to speak of.

The connexion was, accordingly, very unpopular with the elder Holford. He positively refused his consent to their marriage, and neither prayer nor pleading could alter his resolution.

Mr. Rutherford took up a neutral position in the matter; whilst Warin, throwing off the yoke that had for so long galled him and fettered his freedom, implored Sybil still to consent to be his wife.

"Let his father cast them off," he said. "He would work, toil, to support her, if she would only share his fate."

But to this wild proposal Sybil was far too high-principled to consent—too proud, in her simple way, to enter any family who were unwilling to receive her as their equal.

Maddened by the obstacles opposing his happiness, Warin again sought the presence of his father. Terrible was the scene that ensued. Giving vent to the injured feelings, the pent-up passions of years of neglect and insult, the young man, after vainly endeavouring to induce Mr. Holford to alter his resistive *fiat*, in bitter, stinging words, poured forth his wrathful upbraidings, only to be met with malignant insult and scornful indifference. They parted, mutually enraged.

As Warin crossed the threshold of the room, under the excitement of passion he turned again, and, confronting his father, breathed a solemn

Digitized by Google

vow that he never would look upon his face again, never more enter the door of Holford Manor-house, whilst life was spared to him. He never did. When, by his father's death, he became its possessor, he did not revisit the place, but lived and died in a foreign land—even in death his bones lying not in the sepulchre of his ancestors.

With his parent's curse resting on his head Warin sallied forth, a penniless wanderer on the face of the earth. One other appeal to Sybil Rutherford to share his lot, but equally in vain with the first attempt, and he had left his native land for ever.

He married, in Italy, the beautiful daughter of an artist, amongst whose pupils he had enrolled himself. She died in giving birth to Grace. Warin did not survive her many years. He expired in the prime of life, bequeathing the guardianship of his little daughter to his former love, who was still unmarried, having made up her mind to remain so all her life for the sake of Warin Holford.

A strange coincidence might be traced in the destinies of every member of that household. It was the earnest wish of Mr. Holford to have married his eldest daughter to her cousin, Ralph Sherburne, an alliance equally desired by his parents. And Ralph loved his beautiful cousin as much as he was capable of loving any one; he took it for granted she shared the sentiment, and looked on it as a matter of course that she would some time or other become his wife, with-

Digitized by Google

out requiring any trouble in the winning. It somewhat unpleasantly opened his eyes one fine day when, with careless plainness making easy allusion to a common future interest in some point under discussion at the moment, Ermentrude indignantly inquired his meaning, and he was hurried into an explanation of his intentions, to receive from her lips a very decided and hopeless rejection.

In those days Ralph was easy and good-natured, but with scarce a thought beyond his horses and his dogs—no object beyond field-sports and a good dinner; whilst clever, imaginative, and impetuous Ermentrude, did not possess one idea in common with him. They had before been very good friends, but from the hour when first she learnt he cared for her beyond mere cousinly preference, she imbibed a positive feeling of dislike, not unmixed with contempt, for Ralph Sherburne.

His father's house had proved as fatal to Ermentrude's peace of mind as it had been fateful to her brother. In hopes of thereby promoting their favourite scheme, her parents had allowed her often to stay there; but, less open-hearted than Warin and Sybil, when on his approaching departure for India her old playmate, Basil, had been betrayed into a confession of his attachment and found it reciprocated, they had been content to rest on a mutual understanding, unrevealed to others and strong in trust, to part, resting hopeful in quiet faith that at some distant day their union might be sanc-

Digitized by Google

tioned. Before two years of their separation had elapsed he heard of her marriage with his rival!

Though so richly endowed by nature, they were a luckless race. Anilla, the youngest child, grew up to womanhood, more beautiful, more charming than all; gentle and loveable, resembling but little the rest of her family, she was her mother's darling; and even the stern father grew less harsh and forbidding when dealing with her.

At the time of her introduction into society a new actor made his appearance upon the scene. The Rector of Holford took pupils, to prepare them for the University. A young man of maturer age than the general run of his scholars came to read with him. Handsome, gentlemanly, and attractive, Roland Kirkland was eagerly hailed as a great addition to the society of the neighbourhood. Moreover, with that wondrous facility country gossips possess for diving into the individual history of everybody, it was soon ascertained that he was the reputed heir to immense wealth, his home being with a rich uncle, who having made a large fortune in business, and possessing no children of his own, had adopted Roland, the orphan son of a less prosperous brother.

Young Kirkland mingled in the same circles as Anil Holford; he was allowed to dance with her, sing with her, was constantly a guest at Holford Manor, and it had long been clear to every uninterested spectator that he was her devoted admirer. What wonder, then, the

Digitized by Google

youthful pair failed to comprehend the nice distinction drawn for them by indomitable pride, between mere liking as an agreeable companion and loving for life? or, frankly acknowledging their mutual preference, be much surprised to meet with discouragement and repulse? "So far shalt thou go, and no further." Mr. and Mrs. Holford had never dreamed that any child of theirs could, for an instant, consider the nephew of a Manchester cotton-spinner in any nearer light than that of a casual acquaintance.

Aware the barrier his own poverty raised between them, Roland had written to consult his uncle before ever he spoke to Anil. The old man answered the appeal in person; was charmed with his nephew's choice; openly announced his intentions of making him his heir; and leaving Roland to plead his cause with Anil, gallantly undertook to broach the subject to Mr. Holford. In the haughtiest, most repulsive manner, his suit was rejected. Won over to pity by the sight of Roland's misery, the elder Kirkland for a while continued to plead his cause—a hopeless task to make any impression on that obdurate heart. Finally, pride rose up to meet pride; the trampled on turned again—"He wanted no unwillingly extorted consent; he needed no helpless fine lady in his family," the old merchant at last indignantly told Mr. Holford. "If it was reckoned such a wondrous honour to let an honest young lad marry a pretty lass, for his part he should be thankful to decline the burthen of obligation

Digitized by Google

the permission to do so entailed with it. There were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it; and if Roland wanted a wife, there were plenty of young women who would be very willing, and glad enough too, to have him. Gold dust was better than old bones," he grimly remarked, giving a noisy slap to his waistcoat-pocket, until the money it contained rattled again; "and a good rent-roll much to be preferred to a musty strip of parchment, comprising nothing but a list of confoundedly ugly names!"

His aristocratic listener's face was a sight to see, I can assure you, when Mr. Kirkland, with a snort like an enraged walrus, wound up this "shockingly low harangue," as Mr. Holford termed it.

After this vulgar outbreak the case, of course, became utterly hopeless; indeed, from thenceforth Mr. Kirkland's opposition was as strenuous as that of Mr. Holford. He positively forbade Roland, under pain of disinherison, ever to see or think of Anil any more. But, as the old song runs, "Love will still be lord of all," and opposition only tended to strengthen the young couple's attachment, meetings openly forbidden still continued to take place by stealth, and constant communication one way or another to be held between them. Perhaps, had Anil been differently treated at home, matters might have assumed a different aspect, but taunt and harshness were now her daily portion. Receiving no sympathy from any one but Ermentrude — and even she had never won her sister's confidence,

Digitized by Google

and had no idea of what was going on; for Anil well knew nothing on earth could have induced Ermentrude to act as she was doing—the poor child passed her days in despair and tears, and moped and pined about the place—her beauty fading, her health becoming undermined, happiness shattered.

One morning Anil was missing: she had fled from her father's house with Roland Kirkland!

Mr. Holford refused to pursue the fugitives. A penitent letter received next day announced her marriage.

From that hour her family rejected her; her parents, carrying their resentment to the grave, never saw her again: she had irretrievably forfeited their forgiveness.

Mr. Kirkland was equally offended, and in turn absolutely refused to pardon their rash act of disobedience. He had never forgotten the insolent treatment he had received from Mr. Holford, and visiting the sins of the parent on the child now wrote to Roland:—"He had warned him what would be the result of his persisting in marrying Anil Holford, therefore, as he had chosen to walk into the snare laid for him with his eyes open, he might repent at his leisure, whilst reaping what he had been at such trouble to sow." A postscript appended to the letter further announced that "Roland might lessen his expectations for the future, as already the will made in his favour had been revoked, and his uncle had bequeathed every farthing he possessed to different public charities."

Digitized by Google

Thrown on their own resources, for awhile the young couple contrived to exist on Roland's own small pittance. But both had been brought up in habits of luxury, and were totally ignorant of the divers contrivances, the ways and means of good management. Life grew harder; dark clouds loomed in the horizon of their destiny: still, though it was weary work, they bravely fought out the battle of existence. He toiling for wife and child at whatsoever his hand and brain could find to do, and she by needlework adding her small share to their scanty income.

It was disheartening striving. The world went ill with them; and with the best endeavours—failing in capital and friendly interest in this present over-peopled age—it is always hard to realise success.

Rapidly passing over all details of their toilsome course, suffice it, under the pressure of mental anxiety and over-labour, Roland's health by little and little failed, and finally sank beneath the "ceaseless toil and endeavour" of his lot.

The doctors prescribed complete rest of body and mind as the only possibility of saving life. But how could he rest with two helpless beings dependent on his exertions?

He laboured yet. It was only for a very little while longer he was enabled to do so.

In alternations of sickness and convalescence another year waned away. Finally he became so ill, it was impossible for him any more to drudge on in his struggling attempt to earn his daily bread. Taking advantage of a slight

Digitized by Google

amendment in his fading life, at his desire they quitted London, and, by such easy stages as he could bear, travelled northwards. It was his wish to die near Holford: he fancied, if he were removed from earth, her friends must pardon his wife and show her some little kindness.

Arrived on their way as far as Hammerton, there, in consequence of the fatigue and exertion of the journey, Roland had a relapse, reducing him to so alarming a state of weakness that it effectually precluded any idea being entertained of travelling further for some time to come. Then Anil bethought herself of turning her wondrous musical talents to account. Through the interest of their doctor and Mrs. Vaughan, who had met with her in the course of her district visitings, Mrs. Kirkland's desire became generally known, and she had received employment.

At Hammerton, and so situated, Basil Rutherford, as has already been related, discovered them.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Should you find you need my aid to work out your office of mercy write to me, and at your bidding I will join you; but unless I am absolutely required, remember, Sybil, I would as lief be excused revisiting Hammerton," said Basil, putting his head into the railway-carriage, in which he had just placed his sister.

The train was already in motion, and Sybil was soon whirled out of sight. The following morning he received a few hurried lines, notifying a safe arrival at her destination, but giving no details. The post, two days later, brought Mr. Rutherford the following letter:—

"I fear I must claim your promise, dearest Basil, and ask you to come to me. Since my arrival here Mr. Kirkland has become so rapidly worse, no hope can be entertained that he will much longer be spared to his family; of course it would be impossible for me to leave Anil at such a time, and, under the circumstances, it would be a great comfort to have you near to direct my actions. In all my much-tried life I have never passed through twenty-four such



Digitized by Google

hours of painful anxiety as the last have proved, or shared in such silent, heart-breaking grief. You know, dear, I would not ask you to come unless the necessity were real; therefore pray do not refuse my request, but let me see you at Hammerton as quickly as possible. Best love to Gracie; bid her be a good child during my absence.

"Your ever-affectionate sister,
"SYBIL RUTHERFORD."

That evening found Basil again at Hammerton. Sybil was waiting for him on the platform. He caught sight of her anxious face as, looking from the carriage window, he was speculating on the strange chapter of accidents that had twice in such a short space of time brought him, *nolens volens*, to that uninteresting locality. She looked ill and worn, but her countenance brightened a little when she saw him; the nervous, lingering clasp of her fingers round his, betraying how thankful she was to have him near her. They walked up the street together.

"Have you any improved news of your friends for me, Sybil?"

"None! Mr. Kirkland is perhaps a shade better to-day than yesterday, but it is nothing to count upon. He is very patient and calm, awaiting the approach of Death without dismay; and its coming cannot be long deferred—the change that has taken place in him is now observable to any one. How thankful we ought to be that we were permitted to find him when we

Digitized by Google

did, so that his mind may be set at rest as to the future care of his wife and child!"

She felt him press her arm against his side, and saw by the working of his features how full of emotion was his heart; but he made no reply, and they walked on in silence.

"What of Mrs. Sherburne?" he asked at last, with a slight tinge of impatience in his tone that Sybil had not commenced the subject.

"She has neither come nor written, though I wrote very urgently to her. I know not what to think—how to account for her strange silence."

"Pshaw! what else could you expect?" muttered Basil.

They had reached the top of the street—there the road branched off; on one side to the hotel, on the other the way which led to the Kirklands' house.

"Why take the turn to the left, when you know your impulse leads you in the contrary direction?" asked Basil, abruptly stopping.

"Will you really go to them?" exclaimed Sybil, looking at him doubtfully, and clasping her hands in delight.

"What objection could I have, if you wish it?" he replied, with the cold, peculiar stiffness of embarrassment.

Arrived there, Sybil left her brother in the sitting-room whilst she went to seek for Anil. Basil glanced round the meanly-furnished chamber, and pondered upon Anil's changed lot, the hardships and sufferings she had endured and was enduring, until he grew quite unnerved.

Digitized by Google

Little Uda was the first to break in upon his solitude. When his sister returned she found them talking together like fast friends, the child perched upon Basil's knee.

The meeting between him and Anil was an indescribably trying moment to both, but got over better than he anticipated. There was no time for allusions to the past, or many words, which tended to help them on; and Sybil hurried her away to snatch a little repose whilst she took her place by Roland's side, in order that his wife might be better enabled to watch all night by him—that office of love she would not allow any one to take from her.

The next morning Basil was there again, at a very early hour. "I must see Mr. Kirkland in the course of to-day if it be in any way practicable," he said, very gravely, to his sister. Later, he was ushered into the presence of the dying man. Wistfully Roland scanned his countenance.

"I am a stranger to you," faltered Mr. Rutherford, his heart aching as he caught sight of the worn-out, spectre-looking form before him. "As an old friend of Mrs. Kirkland's family only have I ventured to intrude at such a moment."

"True, we have never met before; yet it does not seem like meeting a stranger, Anil has so frequently spoken of you; and lately, for how much have we not to thank you!"

"I asked for this interview," continued Basil, awkwardly enough, his feelings impeding his

Digitized by Google

powers of speech, "in order that I might set your mind at rest on one essential point, where, naturally, it must be much troubled—your wife and child!"

"Poor helpless ones!" he interrupted him, "so soon to be left desolate, and without provision! Yet I strive for faith fearlessly to confide them to the care of the merciful God of the widow and orphan."

"I will not weary you with words; I only wish to assure you, that as long as life is spared to me I will befriend them to the utmost of my power," rejoined Basil, earnestly.

"It was the only weight resting upon my mind, and you have removed it. I thank you, Mr. Rutherford, more than I can express, and still more thank my God that He has vouchsafed in His mercy to raise up to us such a friend in the hour of sorest need, when all seemed failing us."

"You know how nearly I once possessed *a right* to offer you this aid," pursued Basil, sadly. "I have been hard and cruel at heart for long, cherishing revengeful feelings; but I will do so more. You may trust me."

With difficulty Roland partially raised himself up in bed, and turned his languid gaze full upon him. "I feel I may do so," he said, confidently, "and prove it by asking no further pledge. My dear ones will be safe in your care." He sank back on his pillow, his lips still moving in prayer. "Few and evil have been the years of my pilgrimage," he resumed, in a faint voice;

Digitized by Google

"but the days of my mourning are well-nigh ended, and I am thankful."

He pressed Basil's hand in his feeble grasp, fervently blessed him, and then asked him to call Anil back.

They all came in; Anil, Sybil, and the child: he kissed his wife and Uda, and begged them not to leave him again: then he asked to have the prayers for the dying read from the Visitation Service. They knelt round him; his wife, in her clear, touching voice, impressively fulfilling his request. How could she utter the words with such strange composure, the heart within throbbing well-nigh to bursting, her soul wrung with sorrow, except that the holy calm of her husband's face, the heaven-like peace of his spirit about to enter into the rest of the blessed, upheld her? The strength from above sustaining him seemed likewise to have passed into her spirit, imbuing her with a strength not her own, an exalted confidence beautiful to witness.

"You are not feeling worse, darling?" as she rose from her knees she anxiously asked, fondly hanging over him.

"No, not worse, only so weary; I fancy I could sleep. Anil, I have brought on you much misery and sorrow, and you have been to me an unequalled support and blessing. It was cruelly selfish to bring down such unmerited punishment on your dear head, by making you my wife. Forgive me that I cannot regret more that it has been so, since it has given me the blessing of having you near me now."

Digitized by Google

"What have *I* to forgive, Roland? I, who would rather have suffered adversity a thousand times deeper than we have done as your wife, than been prosperous apart from you, since it has enabled me to walk through life, and, God grant, through eternity also, by your side!'"

He passed his hand lovingly over her head.

"Mr. Rutherford has promised me, Anil, to do all he can for you and Uda," said Roland, indicating Basil by a motion of his hand; "and he will do so, I am convinced. We are parting but for a short time, my Anil; we shall very soon again be united in that heavenly country, never to part any more. 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,'" he murmured. Then, his head resting on her breast, his hand locked in hers, a happy smile upon his face, he sank into a deep, placid slumber — a slumber that knew no waking.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER IX.

BASIL stole softly out of the sick man's chamber; he felt he needed solitude to analyse his surging thoughts; his spirit was agitated, oppressed, with an inexpressible awe. To stand so near the presence of death was a solemn, reflection-stirring thing. He went into the deserted parlour, and sat there, apart and alone, to commune with his heart and be still.

At that moment he envied the dying man his near approach to rest; he was as willing to exchange places with him as any human being could ever be to part with life for death, to relinquish the known for the unknown. In the then highly-wrought state of his feelings, viewing the future by the melancholy light the past threw over his days, life, with its frets and cares, its crosses and responsibilities, seemed a wearisome, valueless prospect, more irksome to encounter than the grave — the fitful pleasures of this world of little account, whilst an indescribable yearning swayed him to grasp the everlasting joy and peace of "the land of the leal."

So, brooding over the solemn contemplation, his head buried in his hands, lost to all sights

Digitized by Google

and sounds around him, he was totally unconscious of the rattling carriage-wheels that were disturbing the repose of the retired street: he never heard the vehicle dash up to the house-door, and stopping there; nor the clatter and bustle of an arrival — a well-known voice asking in quick succession many questions; nor rapid steps upon the stairs. He heard nothing of all this. Not till the door was impetuously thrown open — not till she stood upon the very threshold, having in her eager haste passed the slow servant-girl showing the way, was Basil aware of her proximity.

She came in — her colour raised, her eyes dilated with the excitement of expectation, Anil's name upon her lips, looking lovely—most lovely; so like her old former self, as he had seen her years ago in her girlhood; — she came in, and found herself, to her dismay, face to face with Basil Rutherford. She started; half drew back; neither spoke one word. He rose and stiffly bowed to her, his face rigid and white as marble; but the pride of one who felt he had been bitterly wronged enabling him to compress every feeling down. He never advanced a step, but stood, half confronting her, half turning, with a glance of awkward vexation, towards the side-door leading into Roland's apartment, quite resolved to leave recognition and its fashion to *her* choice, not *his*. For an instant she quailed before those piercing eyes, then rallying herself, met his gaze with a look strong and proud as his own; and slightly apologising for intruding

Digitized by Google

on him, "an intrusion as unwished for as unexpected," she said, with easy dignity crossed the room, and rang the bell.

Five minutes may have elapsed, yet no one had answered the summons; the lady looked displeased, bit her lips with evident annoyance, and stroked down the fur of her muff. Basil still maintained his old position, as if insensible of her presence. Again she rang; again no reply.

"Apparently this bell does not ring," she said at last, turning towards him, still avoiding his eye; "might I so far trouble you to ask some one to inform Mrs. Kirkland I am here?"

Such common-place words, spoken with such careless indifference! but now the sound of these accents, so long unheard, made his heart quiver and beat.

"Certainly." His own voice sounding strangely hollow to him as he caught the tone, he moved to leave the room — demurred — came back. "Pardon me for hesitating to obey your wishes; but I left your sister not half-an-hour ago watching by her husband, who had fallen into a deep sleep after a very trying day. I fear, therefore, there remains no alternative but for you to wait until he wakes," he observed, with frigid politeness.

"Indeed! Then can I see Miss Rutherford? The letter was from her which summoned me here."

"Sybil is with Mrs. Kirkland, filling the post by her side which of right belongs to, but has been abandoned by, others."

Digitized by Google

"The servant tells me my brother is considered worse to-day. Is it your opinion there exists cause for any immediate apprehension?" she asked, unheeding the reproof his words conveyed, and gaining confidence as his impassive unconcern thawed into implied reproach.

"Your brother? If you honour me so far as to inquire *my* opinion, humanly speaking I do not consider it possible he can live to see another sun rise."

"And Anil, how is she? How does she bear up?"

"As a Christian only can, Mrs. Sherburne; in quietness and confidence. She is broken-hearted, but resigned."

"Poor darling!" murmured Ermentrude, sadly. "I thank you, Mr. Rutherford," she said aloud, suddenly resuming her former haughtiness. "I will wait here until my sister be disengaged, and need not detain you further."

He inclined his head and walked off to the window.

She glanced towards the door, as if to suggest it was her wish he should leave her.

"I regret I cannot relieve you of my society," he negligently resumed; "but having promised my sister to remain until she rejoined me, and there being no other room wherein I can wait, I fear it must be my misfortune to encroach upon your patience a little while longer. The interview shall be a silent one," he added, resentfully.

Digitized by Google

She selected a book from amongst two or three lying on the centre table, and sank into the chair nearest her, never moving it, though she directly faced him as she sat; he standing by the window, negligently looking out into the street. So they remained.

The afternoon was far spent when she had arrived. The sun went down, the early night closed in; no lights were brought, but the moon rose, and its cold beams poured into the room, the clear glimmering rays making the surrounding aspect of things appear doubly forlorn and cheerless. Mrs. Sherburne shuddered as she glanced round the dreary apartment, and drew her shawl closer round her. Basil's lip derisively curled as he watched her, shivering over the embers of the dying-out fire; but she never asked him to mend it, or attempted to touch it herself. After a while he had compassion, drew near, and knocked it together; it burnt up cheerily, shedding a comfortable glow over the room. He drew a chair forward and sat down opposite her, chafing his hands at the blaze. He endured the self-imposed trial better than Ermentrude. Since he had approached she had grown troubled and restless.

"I regret you should have to wait here so long; this detention must, I fear, prove singularly irksome to you," he remarked, after an embarrassed pause.

"Not in the least; my book has proved remarkably entertaining, and has somewhat tended to beguile the time."

Digitized by Google

"My sister will be surprised to learn you are here," he went on, evidently *determined* to talk; "she has been expecting you many days."

Ermentrude was leaning back, holding the book before her eyes, so that he could not see her face; busily turning over its pages, she did not seem to consider his remark needed a reply. For want of something to do he again stirred up the fire, muttering something to the effect "it was growing so dark she could not possibly see to read."

"There are candles on the mantelpiece; they may as well be used," she abruptly said. "I so particularly dislike fire-light."

"You are changed, then, in your tastes," he quietly observed, as he got up to light them. He repented the next moment letting the words escape him.

"Changed!" she repeated, mockingly. "I believe so—I sincerely hope it—changed in everything!"

She suddenly altered her previous manner, and began to converse, lightly, pleasantly, on every common topic. He followed her lead, but, somehow, the conversation in its course veered round to the immediate object of interest near them, and fell upon Roland and Anil, Ermentrude gleaning every particular concerning them she could from him; yet herself admitting, revealing, neither thought, opinion, nor detail.

"My poor sister! what a life of misery and

Digitized by Google

penury she brought upon herself by that one mistaken step!"

"You consider Mrs. Kirkland did wrong in following out the dictates of her heart, and marrying the man she loved?" asked Basil, with assumed unconcern.

"Undoubtedly! In what other light but that of a misplaced attachment could any one consider it? A decided *mésalliance* in every respect."

"Yet the *misplaced* attachment has stood the test of adversity without break or crack. Nay, more; only to-day I heard your sister say 'She would rather have suffered as it has been her lot to do, than been prosperous apart from her husband!'"

"Mere infatuation! To me, death seems, in this case, sent in mercy, to rescue Anil from care and sorrow, and restore her to her own again," she said, in a hard, dry, frigid manner, as if bent on allowing no loophole for womanly tenderness to escape her.

"That such love as theirs has power to outlive the grave, not even eternity separating their hearts, or annulling it, is my firm belief. Therefore, death can do little in that respect. My code is different to yours, Mrs. Sherburne."

A half shrug of her graceful shoulders.

"But no doubt," he went on, hotly, now thoroughly provoked by her apathy—real or assumed, which was it?—"No doubt incomprehensible to the many, content to barter sterling affection for worldly wealth; who can

Digitized by Google

only care for others with a prudent measured regard, easily cast aside when it impedes the progress of their ambition, and whose shallow natures, admitting the pomps and vanities of earth as heart-rivals to love, are incapable of steadily limiting their devotion to one only."

"What a pity fortune was thrust upon you, Mr. Rutherford! If ordinarily enabled to improvise with such dramatic eloquence, it might have been amply secured you upon the stage," she said, drily; a strange smile flitting across her face as she resumed her book.

She had contrived to make Basil feel remarkably foolish; altogether, her manner greatly annoyed him. He told his heart he hated her; indifference would have been a more promising feeling.

It was well, perhaps, for both that Sybil at that moment opportunely came in to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* so undesired.

"He still sleeps; but fearing you would be thoroughly tired waiting for me, I have come away," she said, trying to close the door without noise, not looking into the room as she spoke.

Basil had risen, and was standing between her and Ermentrude. "Whatever mine may have been, the patience of a visitor who has been waiting some time to see you has well-nigh become exhausted. Mrs. Sherburne has arrived, Sybil," oddly enough he stammered out.

Miss Rutherford turned quickly round, glancing bewilderedly from one to the other.

"My dear, dear Sybil! I am so very glad

Digitized by Google

penury she brought up [illegible]mentrude, impulsively mistaken step!"

"You consider [illegible]e, poor thing!" sighed following out the [illegible] proof of his hatred?). marrying the [illegible] not so much changed as you with assume [illegible] believe you."

"Undoing up his hat, intending to withdraw that of [illegible] panacea to whatever annoyed or consid[illegible] a quiet stroll; but lingered, under respe[illegible] brushing it, for he heard Ermentrude

[illegible] how unfeeling you must have thought me, [illegible] coming sooner! but I was from home, and [illegible] only received your letter yesterday. And then I could not start at once. Ralph being still absent, I was obliged to write for *permission* to come," she remarked, with bitterness. "Your letter, Sybil, contained the first intelligence I had received of my sister for five long years: judge, then, how welcome it was to me," she said, sadly.

"Then poor Mr. Kirkland's two appeals never reached you? I was sure of it!"

"Could you credit it of me, Sybil, that if I had received them I should have remained silent?" she answered, reproachfully. "The fate of those letters remains hereafter to be inquired into; we will not speak of them now. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;' always with me, Heaven knows!" she added, with a hurried, uncomfortable laugh.

"You look so tired, Ermentrude, I am sure you must need refreshment."

Digitized by Google

"I have fasted since eight o'clock this morning."

"How sadly deficient in forethought I have been in not offering dinner!" apologetically remarked Basil, who had by this time brushed his hat into a state of extraordinary smoothness.

"Nay, I can quite well wait until your usual dinner hour."

But Sybil had dined early, and was only going to have tea. Mrs. Sherburne preferred that, and would not be persuaded otherwise. Then Basil left them for his stroll, not returning until late. When he came in, the sisters had met, and Ermentrude, still there, was sharing Anil's vigil. He found Sybil alone, dozing on the sofa.

"I was only feeling lazy," she said, sitting up, though he entreated her not to move. "Basil, dear, I have done nothing but think about you. I am so grieved you should have had that unnecessary trial to-day; if I had had an idea of it, I would, at any cost, have spared it you."

"It must have happened sooner or later, and was better got over, Syb. She is so changed, it is not like meeting the same person. All love has long ceased on my part, and, since I have seen her again, I can likewise safely affirm, all regret."

The sisters remained apart together in Roland's chamber; the Rutherfords sat up in the adjoining room. Mrs. Sherburne looked in once or twice, always strangely self-collected;



Digitized by Google

but Anil never quitted her watch by the dying man. He slumbered calmly on until midnight, then the call came. In sleep—without death-agony or struggle—the soul passed, and, freed from its mortal tenement, winged its flight to heaven!

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER X.

The funeral day came—that solemn, mournful day, when, for the first time, we tangibly realise the loss of our dead—when the hearts of mourners fail within them beneath the crushing sense of bereavement and loneliness, which weighs them down to earth—a Loneliness that may be grasped.

That day of tribulation, in which no *earthly* comfort can be found, no human strength that can sustain—when they would utterly sink and perish beneath the darts of anguish which pierce the soul, were it not that here is manifested "the patience and the faith of the saints," and that the blessed words from Holy Writ come back to memory, raising the soul to contemplations above the grave—uplifting tearful eyes from the narrow coffin and its gloomy death-trappings to the clear sky above, from whence once descended that heavenly voice which said,—"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for *they rest from their labours!*"

It was Anil's wish to follow the remains of her husband to their final resting-place. Her mind seemed so earnestly bent on paying this

Digitized by Google

last sad tribute of love, they never attempted to oppose or dissuade her from its fulfilment.

She was very tranquil—almost painfully composed. One piercing sob, the strong cry of helpless despair wrung from a breaking heart, echoed through the room, as, looking upon Roland's face, she first saw the awful stillness of death imprinted there; but since then neither tears, nor any other outward expression of grief, had escaped her. She had passively left all preparations to Basil Rutherford, and spent the hours that intervened between the decease and interment of her husband in the room where her dead lay.

She was kind and affectionate in her manner to Sybil, and would often tell Ermentrude she liked to know she was near at hand, and would dwell on the comfort she was to her; but she seemed to prefer keeping her melancholy watch alone, and gave them no encouragement to remain for companionship. Occasionally she would call in her child, and speak to her of Roland. It seemed her one urgent endeavour to impress his image, and every little trait of character she could recall, on the tablets of Uda's recollection.

He was to be buried in the graveyard of a quiet, humble church, a little way out of the town. He had once expressed a wish to lie there, as he and Anil passed through it in the course of a country stroll.

There they bore him, on a soft, spring day, when the honeysuckles were bursting into leaf—the buds of the earliest-foliaged trees peeping

Digitized by Google

out green—the birds sweetly singing in the hedgerows—all nature typical of the Resurrection.

The widow and the young orphan, the two kind friends, Ermentrude, John Vaughan, and the good-natured little Doctor, were all that stood round Roland's grave. They were, every one, true mourners.

Mrs. Sherburne was greatly overcome. Her tears fell fast and unrestrained, whilst the beautiful, comforting words of the Burial Service were being read. But Anil never wept; only when the coffin was about to be lowered into the grave she devoutly kissed it, laying her trembling hand on it with clinging tension, as if to detain it with her—such a wild, imploring look of agony, in her eyes.

The rite was ended; but she lingered whilst the fresh earth was heaped above him. Young Vaughan and the Doctor had considerately withdrawn. Sybil and Ermentrude were sitting waiting for her in the church porch. Only Basil and Uda remained near.

"It will not be for long," she murmured; her gaze intently fixed upon the grave. "He told me we should soon meet again, never to part more. You and Sybil will be kind to my child when I am gone to join him?" she presently added, addressing Basil.

"As your husband lay on his death-bed I gave my promise that I ever would be so. I solemnly repeat it here over his grave,—trust me, I will be your little one's lifelong guardian.

Digitized by Google

But God grant you may long be spared to fill the office in my place!"

She made no answer, but continued thoughtfully contemplating the sod, until, the others joining her, then (perhaps it was her mute reply to his remark) she put little Uda's hand in his; and taking her sister's arm, after one lengthened, parting gaze, she left the spot.

As Basil followed with his youthful charge, he caught sight of John Vaughan wistfully watching their movements over the furthest-off hedge that bounded the graveyard.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XI.

"And we really must lose you to-morrow, Ermentrude? A very sudden decision this, is it not?"

"I have already stayed too long; to-morrow, at latest, I must go home — *home!*" repeated Ermentrude, musingly.

"It would be such a comfort to poor Anil to have you here until she leaves Hammerton. What a pity Mr. Sherburne could not arrange to come for to-day's sad ceremony! Perhaps then we might have persuaded him to let you remain a while longer; anyway, pleasanter for you to have had his escort home, if go you must."

"A rare pleasure, truly, in Mr. Sherburne's present condition of mind!" she said, sarcastically, tossing a letter across the table to Miss Rutherford as she spoke. "Read that, and henceforward judge for yourself, *mon enfant.*"

Sybil drew the paper from its envelope, and read as follows: —

"Your letter of the 6th inst. has been forwarded to me here; from its tenor I presume you anticipate a reply — an expectation which,

Digitized by Google

under all circumstances, not a little surprised me. Being consistent in *my* actions, which you are not, I most certainly shall decline attending the funeral of a man whose existence I have pointedly ignored in life, and who by rights should never have been connected with my family. *You* have taken your own line and must abide by the result. You went to Hammerton in open defiance of my expressed wishes; to write inviting me to follow you is the perfection of the pleasing farce of duty and obedience you have so skilfully played out, the climax of the course of hypocrisy which for years you have adopted in your daily conduct towards me. It is time we should come to a clear understanding on this subject, in pursuance of which resolve I lay on you a solemn injunction to return at once to your home, or take the natural termination of further disobedience and leave it for ever; which, as I cannot flatter myself that any commands of mine will have more effect than my *wishes* already have had, is the result I am fully prepared to experience. From

"Your husband,
"RALPH SHERBURNE."

"What an exalted idea of domestic felicity that letter must give you, Sybil! Such a loving, tender, sympathising heart declares itself in every line!" said Ermentrude, mockingly, as Sybil continued to study the letter in puzzled silence.

"Hush, hush, Ermentrude! it is a painful, cruel letter, but — he is your husband."

Digitized by Google

"No need for reminder of that fact, my dear; my fetters were heavily forged, and sufficiently gall to make their mark indelible. And that was the man, Sybil, who, in our youth, would have moved mountains to obtain only a kind word from me, winning me with as wily a tongue, as subtle, flattering words, as ever were those employed by the serpent to beguile our grandmother Eve."

"When did you receive this letter?" asked Sybil, still conning it over.

"This morning. Why do you ask?"

"This morning, Ermentrude, I saw you sad and tearful — an unhappy woman, maybe; but sorrow and suffering had meekened and softened you: the contrast is striking with the hard mood, in whose indulgence you are dealing so unjustly by yourself now."

"Because I wept beside the dead? And *who*, in my place, could refrain from weeping, when standing by one entered into his rest, with all tears wiped for ever from *his* eyes; and knowing that, with my own pulses beating livingly and strongly, humanly speaking, having years of life before me, I was, to all intents and purposes, dead as the breathless, coffined corpse before me — dead in heart, in faith, in hope, in happiness, with the certain conviction that *my* dead will never, can never, rise to life again any more?"

"Never dead, Ermentrude, never hopeless, whilst we have so many avenues open wherein to forget self—such a boundless province where-

Digitized by Google

in we can benefit our fellow-creatures, thereby beautifying the dreariest existence."

"Ah! you are so good, whilst I am such a miserable sinner! Yes, I *was* foolish enough to give way to one of my softer moods this morning: I do occasionally; but they only leave me ten times harder when they are over. So far, however, you are right, Sybil: I *am* a very unhappy woman. You doubtless are aware—pshaw! all the world must be aware—how little love exists between Ralph and I. But you do not know that I am, besides, an insulted wife—that my daily portion is harshness and neglect—my daily fare to be treated like a slave, and that by one whose mind is a million times inferior to my own," she said, with flashing eyes.

Sybil deliberately folded up the letter and gave it back to Mrs. Sherburne; a deep sympathetic look accompanied the act, but she never answered her in words. To such a confession it was so difficult to know what to say. When people announce victimisation it is always puzzling to answer their morbid, unhealthy complainings, even when they have truth for foundation; a proclamation of wrongs is rather humiliating, and tongue-ties the listener if ever so inclined to be sympathising.

"You will say it was my own fault, or, as Ralph remarks, that I took my own line," she went on, scornfully; "then ask, why I did it? ask, what else could I expect? Oh, Sybil! what else *could* I expect? Blame me, reproach me, preach to me, only speak to me with some little

Digitized by Google

kindness," she rapidly continued. "I have thirsted for some one to care a little bit about me for so long; it is so terrible to stand thus entirely apart and lonely. I never anticipated it, still unflinchingly it could have been borne—and I do not speak presumptuously—had I been enabled to befriend my sister," she plaintively concluded, casting a mournful look on the door leading into the room, whither the widowed Anil on her return from the funeral had shut herself in with her grief.

"But, Ermentrude, let me understand—did you indeed leave your home in open defiance of Mr. Sherburne's wishes?"

She looked down, slightly abashed.

"For years he has kept me apart from Anil, not scrupling to make use of the unfairest means to accomplish his aim," she answered, with indignation. "Yet, in the face of this, I was sufficiently rash, trusting, what you will, to solicit leave to come. Of course, it was refused! and I am here. The thing explains itself. How could I have stayed away, leaving Anil in need and distress, whilst I owned wealth and was surrounded with luxury? When I knew she was in deep grief, pining to have me near her, and still refuse to come? Oh, Sybil! you cannot think how it has refreshed my spirit being with you and her once more: it is like a renewal of old happy days."

"I rejoice to hear you say so. I feared," she added, hesitatingly, "it might have been a

Digitized by Google

more painful than pleasant revival of our former friendship."

"Painful in one way, Heaven knows, Sybil," she said, seriously; then stopped abruptly, as if meditating on her words. "Ralph's antipathy is strong against you and yours," she resumed, unconnectedly; "and it is my having mentioned to him that you and Mr. Rutherford were here which, in my opinion, has so specially annoyed him."

"That is beyond me to understand. When have we ever crossed his path? With more justice, I should say, *we* might entertain the feeling."

"He cared for me once, Sybil,—yes, he did care for me. He may have intuitively divined I never did for him, and where my heart was first given; so resenting it for evermore. Yet, Sybil, since the hour in which I promised to be his wife I have crushed down every thought of olden times, faithfully carrying out the vow I pledged at the altar. He need not fear to trust me," she proudly added.

"Has he often striven by such means as this to encourage you in your work of right, and secure your love?" asked Sybil, with indignation, pointing to Mr. Sherburne's letter. "Poor Ermentrude!"

"Nay, I deserve it; whatever atonement I may have since made, in marrying one when my heart was so entirely given to another, I sinned deeply. I did wrong that good might come of

Digitized by Google

it; that hope failed, as such foundation ever must," she said, wildly, the pent-up sorrow of years now unrestrainedly gushing forth; "and in bitter, remorseful, life-long repentance I must expiate my fault. I have not been a good wife to Ralph, if a true one; I have not striven to love or soften him; I have been the bane of his life as well as of my own. These thoughts, alas! are new-born, Sybil—have only sprung into life since I came here; perhaps they may have been seething longer under the surface, I cannot tell—it is too late to alter now."

"Never too late to repair a mistaken course; forbearance and gentleness will go far towards pleasing, and a cheerful smile, a kind word, are grand softeners of an obdurate heart, especially where love has already once existed."

"The mischief is done past recall. He doubts me — has ever doubted me. I fear him. And where fear takes the place of love and doubt of confidence, fatal is the severance ensuing in the bond of mutual attachment which should indissolubly have united us. The time is gone by for domestic felicity with us. I am opening my heart to you to-night, as I used to do in my girlish days. Shall I go on to tell the tale of my wooing, and how it was I became Ralph Sherburne's wife instead of being your sister, Sybil?"

"Solving an occurrence which has ever been an unexplained mystery to me."

"Meeting Mr. Rutherford here was an unexpected event, and I own that, being so sud-

Digitized by Google

denly brought face to face with him, for the moment quite unnerved me; it so vividly conjured back the past: but the embarrassment of a first meeting over, I realise I have not fought in vain against old feelings. Of course, towards one who was once so much to me, it is impossible quite to feel as if the past had never been; but I can quietly see him come or go, knowing that for life he is and must be nothing to me. Oh, Sybil! if I ever could have respected or esteemed Ralph, I do believe, long ago I should have learnt to care for him: as it is .... but I should only shock and grieve you were I to say '*as it is!*' So to return: what is it you want to know about me, Sybil?"

"Some little explanation of the twisted chain of events which, after Anil's marriage, led on to yours."

"After my father cast her off she used frequently to write, urgently entreating me to plead her cause. I did so, and failed. After a time, letter after letter came telling me of their poverty. You are aware how little means we ever had at our disposal, so *I* could not aid her, and her letters nearly crazed me; the thought of her haunted me, until it absorbed my every idea. I saw no other way of rescue but to marry Ralph. He fathomed the cause of my depression, and made good use of his knowledge. I will not enlarge upon this; it is a hateful period of my life. Suffice it, with promises to aid my sister and her husband, he gained my consent to be his wife; how well he kept his pledge time has

Digitized by Google

proved. To your brother I never vouchsafed word or line of explanation; I considered it better for his happiness that he should deem me utterly heartless, and unworthy of his love, than would have been the case had he been made aware that any palliative existed for my treacherous act. How his bitter taunt of 'bartering sterling affection for wealth' stung me to the quick! how I longed to defend myself when he spoke of 'the pomps and vanities of earth being heart-rivals of love!' Yet I answered him with implied mockery. I thought," she said, "to wound him, and make him hate me more—this happened the day I came—while, all the time, I longed to analyse the inward thoughts hidden under that marble exterior. He baffled me! I often wonder if *I* did him!"

"Men feel so differently to women, it is impossible to understand them, or they us; and it will be so to the end of time."

"I could weep my eyes out for what I said. During our engagement Ralph kept his promise. He exerted his influence to procure employment for Mr. Kirkland. No one, apparently, could have been more willing to help them. This supported me, and seemed to repay my sacrifice of self. I had no wish for Anil to be a pensioner on his bounty, merely that he should permanently and substantially build up their fallen fortunes anew, and that she and I might often be together. But when once we were married, oh! things assumed a very different aspect. Ralph declined doing any more, or even noticing

Digitized by Google

them further. After awhile all communication on Anil's part ceased; and, spite of my efforts to the contrary, I completely lost sight of her. Now, that I find she persistently wrote to me, until two years had elapsed without reply, since I have heard of poor Roland's letters, never received by me, I can only believe false play has been at work, and that Ralph has more to answer for than as yet I have given him credit. I am well repaid, Sybil. It has been a weary, dragging out of a long, heavy chain of thraldom. I have led a life of hypocrisy, though not in the light Ralph declares it to be, since."

"From my heart I feel with you, Ermentrude, if I could only advise or comfort you; but between husband and wife interference is so impossible, so unnatural."

"I believe that, with Ralph, jealousy has turned love into hate. After reading this letter, I am terrified at the fate before me. The future seems darkening around me. I dare not contemplate what life might have been to me. It is fearful as it is. The Nemesis of a broken vow is a terrible power to pursue you with its relentless fury. And what with such adverse, tangible realities—the unceasing self-reproach of an accusing conscience—a tyrant to obey, and a miserable home-life to wrestle against—alone in the world, with no child's face to gladden my eyes—not even a cat or a dog to care for me—you may imagine the forlorn dreariness of my lot of loneliness and sorrow. Pray for

Digitized by Google

me, Sybil! Pray daily for me, hapless and tempted! Pray for succour, help, and comfort to the weak-hearted! Pray for her who now does stand, in mercy to have strength given her to stand and conquer unto the end!"



Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XII.

MEANWHILE Basil had good-naturedly taken Uda out for a walk. She was by nature a peculiarly thoughtful, sensitive little being, and the sorrowful details of the past week had vividly impressed themselves on her mind.

For the first time she had been brought in contact with death—for the first time she had witnessed its awful solemnities—passionately loving her father, she had brooded over his loss—had wept so bitterly for him—and now seemed so silently, tremblingly unhappy, they could not rouse her from the heavy stupor of sorrowful reflections in which she seemed absorbed; whilst her childish mind was painfully active, speculating in puzzled, perplexed thoughts, on mortality.

After her return home from the funeral she went about like one numbed of all sensation. Basil thought the fresh air would restore the tone of her mind, a walk revive her better than any other remedy; so, accordingly, they set out for one together. He was growing very fond of the child; it was something new to have a dependent, helpless little being looking up to him for

Digitized by Google

protection; evidently caring to be with him; implicitly trusting herself to his guidance. He was a silent, reserved man, who said but little of what he thought and felt; but, like most of his sort, with every feeling he did admit, intensified by the very reticence in which it was preserved. Grown cautious by hard experience, and self-controlled, every impulse of his heart was strictly judged and duly weighed before being accepted: and, consequently, once received was secure and genuine.

After rambling about some short time, little Uda expressed a wish to go to the Abbey; accordingly, thither they directed their steps; she telling him, as they went along, all her feelings and fancies; he listening with a degree of absorbed interest he rarely bestowed on anybody. He exerted himself to the utmost to amuse and interest his young charge, and felt himself well repaid by the bright smile and cheered look with which she rewarded his efforts.

"Ah, but when all that happens we shall have left Hammerton for good," said Uda, sadly, in answer to some remark about the pony and other delightful things which were to be at her disposal when at Brereton.

"But shall you not like to exchange Hammerton — dull, smoky place — for Brereton, and gladden your eyes with the beautiful green fields, the deer in the park, and all the gay flowers in the gardens there, and find a little playfellow in your cousin Grace?"

"It all sounds very pleasant," said the

Digitized by Google

child, thoughtfully; "but I love Hammerton, and when we leave it we shall leave papa—poor papa!"

"But, Uda, if spirits can be near and watch over their dead, your father will be as much with you at Brereton as here. You must try and think of him as of a friend in heaven: it was but the lifeless body you parted with to-day, dear, not your father."

"I know—I know; but still I should like to stay near where he lies, it seems to me as if we were less parted. Do people always look so cold and white when they are dead as he did when you took me last to look at him, Mr. Rutherford?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And feel so icy and frigid? No, indeed, it did not seem like looking at papa; we all so sad and crying, and he so still, and calm, and happy. My own papa is above the sky. I like to look up and fancy him there, better than in that dark, narrow grave in which they put him. I shall like being with you better than the trees and flowers, or Cousin Grace." She broke off suddenly. "You will always take care of me; will you not, Mr. Rutherford? And then, mamma is going with me: but she says only for a little while, for Brereton is not to be our home."

"Not always, Uda; but I hope you will come there for a long visit."

"Will Aunt Ermentrude ever be there?" asked the child, after a short silence.

Digitized by Google

"No. Are you so very fond of her?" he answered hurriedly.

"I am fond of her, and I am not exactly fond of her; she takes no notice of me!" said Uda, ponderingly: "but I am sorry for her, she seems so unhappy; it makes me always feel a wish to cry when she is talking to mamma or Sybil, though I never understand what it is she is saying to them."

Basil grasped the little hand clasped in his like a vice, and abruptly began to admire the sunset.

Amongst the ruins, wandering disconsolately about, they met John Vaughan. Basil called him to join them, and left him discoursing with Uda whilst he stood apart in a brown study. The child's remark about her aunt had left an uncomfortable impression on his mind. As long as Ermentrude was cold, unfathomable, and haughty, he could harden his heart against her. It had never struck him she was unhappy, and that, possibly, sorrow and the awkwardness of her position made her so sharp and bitter. A thousand little convictions now dawned upon his recollection, tending to confirm the truth of Uda's surmise. He began to cross-examine himself, and finally decided he had been unnecessarily harsh towards her, and still glad she was going away, to wish they might part friends; uneasily acting on the defensive, as they had hitherto done, was not likely to be profitable to either party. The whole thing was a folly, argued he; they had unseekingly met

Digitized by Google

after a long separation, and as the past could never be recalled, it would have been wiser, for both present and future, had they done so on neutral ground, instead of assuming the useless defiance they had as yet maintained. But when a person's judgment and thoughts turn inwards, consideration, generally speaking, is speedily pronounced a bore; and, not finding his meditations agreeable to self-love, Basil roused himself to attend to his juvenile companions. On looking round for them, he found Uda was again in tears. It made him cross; tired of worry and conflict, he wanted quiet.

"It has taken me half an evening to cheer up that child's spirits. What senseless endeavour have you been about, Master John, undoing all my work in five minutes?" he said, snappishly.

"Uda was talking to me about leaving Hammerton, and——"

"And he said," sobbed out Uda, "that he supposed when I was gone I should forget him, and he should never see me again!" Sob, sob, sob.

"You young monkey! what do you mean by chattering sentimental nonsense when you ought to have your head crammed full with Latin and Greek, to the extinction of every other idea?" said Basil, half laughing, half angry.

"I didn't mean to make her cry," said John, looking ruefully at his weeping companion.

"Nevertheless, you have effectually done so. There—dry your tears, little Uda; remember you are not going where you will be taught to

Digitized by Google

forget real friends. Your old playmate, whenever he wishes it, shall be always welcome to come and see you."

"Will you come?" she asked, piteously, raising her large tear-filled eyes to John's.

"Will I, Uda?—yes, now I may, if millions of miles divided us."

"Humph!" exclaimed Basil; "sets the wind in that quarter? Precocious young gentleman that! Brereton is about fifty miles from Hammerton as the crows fly, if eagerness will furnish you with pinions to go with them," he said stolidly, directly addressing himself to John, "and by railroad, taking the more circuitous way patronised by ordinary mortals, about sixty. Never be hyperbolical in your mode of expression, my good sir," he went on drily; "stilts are out of fashion. How old are you?" all at once he abruptly asked.

"Seventeen last birthday."

"And Uda?"

"Eleven."

"Both much too young to measure distance apart on the brobdignag scale of 'millions of miles,' or cry about separation. Talking such rubbish!" said Basil, testily. "And what, pray, are you going to do for yourself? It is high time you should be turning your hand to something—going to follow in your father's footsteps, hey?"

"I used to wish to be a sailor, but the time is gone by for that; now I am looking out for employment in one of the Government offices."

Digitized by Google

"What a strange thing it is, that hardly ever a clergyman's son wishes to be a clergyman! I wonder why that is?" said Basil, musingly.

"I have little hope of obtaining anything good that I shall like, my mother having no interest of any kind. But I suppose something will turn up."

"Something generally does," said Basil, philosophically. "We will see what we can do for you. Meanwhile do not make Uda cry any more, and leave off talking nonsense."

"Yes, sir. My mother is coming home to-morrow; I should like you to see her."

"I shall be gone, I fear, my boy; I must leave this to-morrow afternoon. My sister will remain with Mrs. Kirkland until she finally quits Hammerton; but probably I shall be returning before then, so I dare say I shall make Mrs. Vaughan's acquaintance. If not, we must try and persuade her to come with you to Brereton."

"She will be delighted, I am certain. How long will Mrs. Kirkland be your guest?"

"As long as ever she pleases; though, I fear, not as long as Sybil would wish. She already talks of being burdensome to us, and distresses her mind with a great many unnecessary scruples."

"She is proud, sir, and hates the idea of dependence — just as I should do."

"There is no dependence in being the guest of two old friends. However, we shall know

Digitized by Google

more about it in a little while; for the present she comes to Brereton. My sister always spends a portion of every year there, to enliven my solitude: her own home is at Holford, near which a young lady, who is her ward, possesses some property, on which she is not allowed to reside until she comes of age — a rival for Miss Uda in your heart, Vaughan, when you come to see us," he added, gaily.

After glancing cautiously round, and ascertaining that Uda had wandered out of hearing, the boy said, whisperingly, colouring crimson as he spoke, — "That could never be, sir; I shall care for Uda first of all my whole life long. *You* look upon me only as a child, I know; but I have quite made up my mind on that subject."

"A candid confession, at all events," exclaimed Basil, laughing.

"As you are her guardian now, sir, I thought it best to tell you this. Now you are warned, sir, ask me or not to Brereton as you think fit."

"Tush, boy! two years hence you will have forgotten all about her. You will make me positively angry if you turn a boyish fancy into a serious matter. Be content to think of Uda solely as the good little engaging girl she is; play at cricket, fish and shoot, follow whatever rational pursuit you will for the next ten years to come, before you think of falling seriously in love; and not then, if you at all value your own happiness."

Digitized by Google

"This absurd folly will cure itself," muttered Basil, moodily; and he let the boy go by without a kindly word.

"Good-by, Uda," said young Vaughan, in a dejected voice, as he passed her.

"Are you already going? I thought you would have come home with us to see mamma."

"Not to-night; maybe to-morrow I shall look in."

"You are so unlike yourself, Master John; what has happened to disturb you?"

"Nothing, dear; I am only in a hurry."

She shook her head reprovingly. "You can never deceive me: something *is* the matter — I am certain of it."

"Well, Uda, if you must know, your guardian has made me angry; and, as you are aware, when I *am* put out I feel very hotly. I dare say he was wise and I foolish, that is all;" he went on, with a faint smile. "Now, God bless you, dear; I will try and forget it: but he struck deep, Uda. Don't catch cold standing about in this chilly place. Good-by, Uda."

And so saying, John walked away. He did "try and forget it," but I doubt if he ever cordially liked Basil again, though he lived to be under obligations to him. Mr. Rutherford had gone the wrong way to teach him wisdom; he had received his confidence with freezing censure, and given terrible pain to his sensibility, inflicting deadly wounds on his weakest point — the usual mistake in the dealings of age with youth.

"What have you been cross to Master John

Digitized by Google

about?" cried the child, running up to Basil with innumerable reproachful daggers darting from her eyes. "How could you have behaved so cruelly?"

"My child," he answered, gravely, "I was not cross, but kind; only, like many another youngster, he mistook friend for foe, and passed perverted judgment on my intentions. I only endeavoured to save him from a romantic fancy, Uda, that, encouraged, would probably have embittered his whole existence: but experience, I believe, is the only road to wisdom. Heaven help the children!" he muttered, impatiently. "These march-of-intellect days make them old before they are young, and a source of never-ending trouble to their poor antediluvian parents and guardians."

He took the child home to her mother; and, not liking to intrude upon Anil on that trying, painful day, would not go in, but left Uda at the door, and passed the rest of the evening in solitude at his lodgings.

The morrow came—a dull, hazy morning, raw and depressing, threatening rain. Ermentrude was leaving by an early train, in order to accomplish her lonely journey in the day.

"What! already equipped? I had no idea it was so late!" exclaimed Sybil, as Mrs. Sherburne entered, cloaked and bonneted.

"There is a good twenty minutes yet before I need set out; only I thought it just as well to get preparations out of the way. Anil is going to walk down to the station with me. Poor

Digitized by Google

dear! I wish I dared stay longer, she seems so miserable that I am going."

"I wish you could; my only consolation being that taking leave of you will bring her the relief of tears—her silent grief terrifies me."

Ermentrude sighed, but said nothing.

"Do you intend accompanying us, Basil?" asked Miss Rutherford.

He was writing letters at a side-table.

"Not unless I can be of any use. These letters must be written."

"Oh! we can do very well by ourselves; Ermentrude has very little luggage," said Sybil, as she put up her work and left the room.

Mrs. Sherburne need not have felt surprised at Basil's decision, he had so scrupulously avoided her, had shown her so little civility, during her visit; yet it so happened that she did acutely feel this one act of inattention: she would have been more than woman, perhaps, if she had not done so. The common courtesy any gentleman would have paid any lady going on a journey without escort or servant would have been to accompany her to the station, and see her safe into the train. She had passively borne with neglect—many a pointed bitter hit had fallen scathlessly on her proud spirit, she taking it all as just retribution for the injury she had inflicted on him—but, trifling as word and deed seemed to be, this last straw had broken down her fortitude. It was hard to say good-by without one friendly expression or forgiving look. She

Digitized by Google

dashed away a tear, and went and stood by the hearth, as she had done at their first awkward meeting.

Little Uda was the only other person in the room. She had been looking out of the window until now, when she came up to her aunt.

"I am sorry you are going," she said, gravely, looking at her face; for Ermentrude's eyes were red with past-by weeping.

Mrs. Sherburne stooped down and tenderly kissed her.

"Uda, dear, you will write to me sometimes, and tell me how your poor mother is. I hope it may not be long before I shall see you both again."

"Mamma cannot bear to part with you: why cannot you stay until next week? then we shall go to Brereton. Do you live near there?"

"A weary way off, Uda."

"But you will come and see us, I suppose?"

"No, dear. Brereton belongs to Mr. Rutherford: it will not be your mother's home, where she can ask whom she likes to come and see her."

"If that is all, I am certain Mr. Rutherford and Sybil will like to see you," affirmed Uda, positively. "Only yesterday he gave Master John an invitation, when he said he should like to go there. May not Aunt Ermentrude come and see us at Brereton, Mr. Rutherford?" she called out to Basil.

Digitized by Google

His pen wrote busily on as if he did not hear her.

"I shall never go to Brereton, dear," whispered Ermentrude. "When your mother is settled in a home of her own, perhaps I shall come and see you there; or, maybe, one day you will come to Ellchurch—that is the name of my home, Uda."

"Cannot you go where you like, and see whoever you please?" asked the child, wonderingly.

Ermentrude shook her head; and her thoughts wandered away to a wish that was strong in her mind to accomplish.

Uda hesitated a moment. Then deliberately walking up to Basil, and softly putting her hand on his arm to attract attention,—

"Why cannot Aunt Ermentrude go to Brereton?" she inquired, in an undertone.

"She says, 'I shall never go to Brereton, Uda!' There is a ghost walks at Brereton, Uda, that stands between your aunt and her going there," he said, in the same low voice—his own husky and faltering.

But Ermentrude's quick ears caught the words. Bending down to address the child, half-looking towards her as he spoke, against their will his eyes for an instant met those of Mrs. Sherburne. He hastily turned away to resume his writing.

Ermentrude was a creature of impulse. She advanced to his side,—

"That ghost has walked long enough, Mr.

Digitized by Google

Rutherford; in my opinion, it would be as well to lay it."

"The exorciser who could accomplish the task must first obtain water from Lethe to sprinkle over it, Mrs. Sherburne."

"It would be the higher part, in full remembrance, with forgiveness to make that troubling spirit rest in peace. You are obdurately cruel, Mr. Rutherford."

"Grant me good cause for a hardened heart and embittered nature."

"This is no fit time for harbouring uncharitable thoughts to foster enmity. It was but yesterday we stood together by a grave and listened to solemn words, for which there will come an hour when they must be pronounced over each of us. With these words fresh in memory, can you and I yet nourish thoughts of strife and rancour? It ill becomes me, as Ralph Sherburne's wife, to solicit your forgiveness," pursued Ermentrude, raising her head proudly; "and had I not worked towards you a bitter wrong, it would have been far from me to do so. We have met here, sharing in sorrowful scenes, for the first time since my ruthless act. I would expiate my fault. All I ask is, that you and I, henceforth, may meet as every-day friends—not in scorn and defiance, as we have done hitherto."

"*Friends!*" he repeated, mockingly.

"I plead no more. It is not right for me to do so. A weight would have been removed from my heart to know I was forgiven—to be

Digitized by Google

assured that I had not been the means of utterly deadening your heart to all human gentleness of feeling; but I can only abide by your decision."

"Whatever I am, it is your doing, Ermentrude; glory or not in your work as you will," he said, impassively.

An expression of acute pain crossed her face.

"I have said all I may," with a deep sigh she answered. "I should have been glad, so far, to have obliterated the record of the past, that when chance threw us together again we might have met less painfully, and no longer have been stumbling-blocks in our respective paths through life. I was wrong in my estimation of the generosity of your heart, and now suffer double humiliation. I have nothing more to say," she added, despairingly; and she moved away from beside him.

Basil buried his face in his hands. The mental struggle going on within his breast was a hard one. Uda sat, with opened eyes, looking at them both, with searching astonishment. All at once he pushed back his chair, started up, and impetuously strode across the room to where Mrs. Sherburne was standing.

"Ermentrude," he said, in low, broken accents, "I do from my heart forgive the injury you have wrought me, the blight you have cast upon my life. I do—I can say this sincerely now. It was useless speaking words until I felt they could be truly uttered. Banishing

Digitized by Google

every hard, revengeful thought, I have entertained against you — though I never believed I could have lived to say this — I pardon the past; only whilst on this earth it is better that we should never meet. God bless you, Ermentrude, and make your life a happy one!"

He took the hand she tendered him; and resting it against the marble mantelpiece, still clasped in his own, laid his head upon it. She felt his scalding tears falling hotly over her fingers.

She neither trembled, nor wept, nor spoke one soothing word.

She quietly drew away her hand.

"Friends now, and always! Peace and good-will are restored between us! I am glad it is so!" she said, with gentle firmness, laying marked emphasis on the word "*friends.*"

He looked up, his face so unspeakably miserable; but all emotion faded away as he met her calmly steady eye.

Mutely he went back to his writing.

They were at peace — friends — but widely sundered for ever!



Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XIII.

When Mrs. Kirkland and Sybil entered the room, Ermentrude was talking to little Uda on indifferent subjects; Basil, still pen in hand, seated at the distant table.

The time came for her to go to the station.

"Good-by, Mr. Rutherford."

"Good-by, Mrs. Sherburne."

A quiet shake of the hand for him, a kiss for Uda, and she was gone!

Her voice was tremulous, and she was nervously shivering with sensation, when she bade Anil farewell. She leaned far out of the carriage for the last possible look at her and Sybil, as they stood together on the platform, continuing her lingering gaze until they grew like little specks in the distance, and she could no longer distinguish them. Turning at last away from her watchful gaze she resumed her seat.

She travelled on with too many absorbing thoughts occupying her mind to find the way tedious or lengthy. As she neared the termination of her journey, her heart grew faint and oppressed. The lowering day had ended in rain. A regular downpour had set in. There

Digitized by Google

was little in external influences to uphold her drooping spirits.

"Carden!—Carden Station!" shouted out by the hoarse, guttural voices of porters, made her heart beat quick with an agitation very foreign to its accustomed nature.

"Carden Station!" She got out and looked around. Had no one been sent to meet her? She was unused to travel alone, or to have to look after things for herself. She resented the unaccustomed neglect.

"Is there no carriage here from Ellchurch, or no conveyance ordered for me?" she haughtily asked the man, who was lifting her trunk on his shoulder to carry it across to the other side of the station.

Ermentrude had spoken the words somewhat after the manner of Mrs. Siddons, when she electrified the servant by her tragically indignant, "I asked for water, and you brought me beer!" The man stared in astonishment at her. She threw back her thick crape veil, when he at once recognised her.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; thought as how you'd been a stranger," he said, apologetically touching his hat. "Aye, the dog-cart's here, waiting for the Squire; but that would never do for you to go in, now it's a-raining so hard: maybe something else is coming presently for you."

"Waiting for Mr. Sherburne, did you say?"

"Yes, ma'am, waiting for the Squire; and yonder he is. Why, he must ha' come by the same train as you did! Well to be sure!"

Digitized by Google

The man looked as if he considered it a very good joke, if he had dared enjoy it; had not her stately manner awed him out of its appreciation. Following the direction of his finger, Ermentrude, in truth, beheld her husband not many yards from her — a groom in attendance carrying his portmanteau, both moving on to the place where the carriages were drawn up outside the station.

He must have passed so very close, he could hardly have avoided seeing her. Her cheeks flushed at this premeditated insult. She caught the porter's look of astonishment riveted on her.

"Take my box, and have it put in the dog-cart at once," she authoritatively ordered. "I can see Mr. Sherburne now," she carelessly continued; "no doubt he missed me in the crowd, there is an unusual number of people here to-day."

The man obeyed. She pressed her hands over her heart to still its nervous beatings, and walked rapidly on. She overtook her husband at the gate where the tickets were given up.

"Ralph!" she called out breathlessly, as she came up with him.

He turned sharply round. He was a large-proportioned man—tall, broad, large-faced, large-whiskered—a fine specimen of muscular strength and mere physical handsomeness, but a wondrous-looking object then in his shapeless waterproof garments all dripping with wet. So attired, his huge frame appeared more unwieldy and gi-

Digitized by Google

gantic than usual, his fresh-coloured face deepened into crimson, his bushy whiskers limp, from the effects of wind and weather.

"Ho!—so you're come back, are you?" was his unceremonious greeting, as, with hands plunged deep in his capacious pockets, he grimly eyed her.

"Yes; did you not see me just now? you passed close by me."

"If I did, or did not, what can it matter?" he said, captiously. "Never expecting you," I might be excused for not recognising you in the lugubrious costume it has been your pleasure to adopt since I last saw you."

Her lip quivered at the coarse allusion to her mourning dress.

"Have you given no orders for the carriage to be sent for me? It is wretched work standing here in the rain."

"I ran up to town yesterday, and am only returning now. Ellchurch was so deadly-lively. Do not blame me, you should have written your own orders."

"You actually passed through Hammerton yesterday!" she exclaimed, unguardedly.

"I did," he said, sharply; "and what of that?"

"Oh, nothing. Ralph, how am I to get home?" she said, imploringly. "I shall catch my death of cold standing here."

"There's my conveyance," he said, nodding towards the dog-cart as he turned upon his heel: "you may come home in that if you will; if not,

Digitized by Google

James can order up a fly for you," he called back to his wife.

"I would rather come in the dog-cart, if you will let me," she answered, following him.

"Jump in, then," he said, taking the reins from the servant. As her foot touched the step the horse suddenly moved on, throwing her forward; she put out her hand to save herself, and fell with her whole weight upon it. The agony was so intense, it drew from her a moan of pain. A volley of oaths from its master's lips was lavished upon the head of the luckless animal. Ermentrude got in as best she could; she bound up her sprained hand, and sat there, suffering excruciating torture, but like one ice-bound, not daring to speak to him. He growled at his horse, and took no further notice of the poor suffering human being at his side, whom he had vowed to comfort, love, and cherish until death parted them! Ralph Sherburne had never referred to the Marriage Service since his wedding-day — it would have been as well had he occasionally made it the subject of study.

So they drove home. A long seven-miles' drive.

They passed Holford Manor-house on their way. The grey old pile looked ghost-like and sad through the misty veil of drizzling rain. She shut her eyes as she went by it—every inch of ground around the home of her childhood was too over-peopled with old familiar faces and gone-by happy hours, which maybe had "won their glory from being far," but still had won

Digitized by Google

it: she dared not trust herself to look upon Holford then.

They passed the church where her parents lay buried. She did not turn away her head as she caught sight of the cross-crowned spire standing out bright through the storm; it was visible for some time before they drove by it; but she earnestly gazed at that, then on the chancel-window — for she knew that near it was placed the elaborately-carved monument erected to the memory of her father. She could just distinguish in the dusk the stately mausoleum in the graveyard beneath which he, and many a previous generation of his race, were sepulchred; where she would probably one day rest herself, when the "fitful fever" life had truly been to her was ended. She shuddered at the thought. That oppressive marble disfigurement was a gloomy place for the living to pre-fancy resting under; it looked as if it must be weighty enough to crush them down for evermore, to feel subduing even in death: but these were senseless imaginings. She pondered on the end of the hollow pride whose indirect consequences had made her the wife of the callous-hearted man beside her. There was little comfort for that poor wife to dwell upon as her thoughts wandered from present to past, then onwards into the unknown future, to return with strange pertinacity to the fateful present.

Her eyes had long been brimful with tears; she could no longer repress them. At sight of her weeping Mr. Sherburne's temper grew

Digitized by Google

worse: he hated to see a woman cry at any time, and now doubly so; it made him involuntarily feel shame for his cruel conduct. He vented his indignation on the horse, it equally rebounded on Ermentrude, and disquieted as if actually levelled upon, as she was well aware his wrath was at, her.

They stopped at the Lodge of Ellchurch; the gates were flung wide open. Through the beautiful wild park, up the avenue of ancient sycamores, dropping a showery welcome from their water-laden branches, they drove on; the rain coming down as if a second deluge were beginning; the wind battering in the umbrella Ermentrude vainly tried to uphold against the vigorous blast.

To reach the front-door it was necessary to ascend an unusually long flight of steps; with some little consideration for her, he drove up to a side-entrance. She got out, but he lingered in the porch giving some directions to his groom. So, unannounced, ungreeted, she entered the house; it was a cheerless welcome home.

She went into the room which they generally occupied during the day, a bright fire was burning in the grate.

She was drenched with rain; but, heedless of that, sat down by the hearth, hovering over the blaze, expecting him to come to her. He never came! Her hand gave her much pain, and had become sadly swollen; she felt too dispirited to move and seek for any remedy to do it good. She rather rejoiced in the physical

Digitized by Google

pain that pushed the anguish of her spirit on one side.

But even that room was haunted with desolate memories, and as she sat there

"Old voices called her from without."

There it had been—how vividly it all rose before her!—that on the night of a gay ball, given to dance out an old year and in a new, long since danced out in its turn,—she and Sybil Rutherford had sat apart by that very hearth, talking over Basil's departure, to take place a few days later. She could hear the toll of the church-bell sounding, even now, that mingled in their conversation. She recalled Basil coming up and interrupting them to ask her to be his partner in the dance, a mere hand-in-hand round, that was to take place as the clock struck midnight, to usher in the infant year. She could see his tall form standing before her, and remembered how, when the time drew on, he had been somewhat dilatory in coming to claim her; and, in momentary pique, she had danced it with Ralph Sherburne. His first triumph over his rival. The beginning foreshadowing the end!

The clash of the joyous peal of bells—the gay carillon tune—Basil's pained, mortified look—Ralph's insolent exultation over him—all stood out a distinct picture before her. Then, her remorse for her deed—for it was such pain, it resembled as strong a feeling. How she had stood in that very room alone—repentant, sad; there Basil had found her, lingering by the win-

Digitized by Google

dow, looking wistfully out on the cold frosty night, and had been led into the confession of his attachment. And her cheek blanched, and she felt chilled and frozen, as she thought of the gulf yawning between Then and Now! And terrified at her own thoughts, terrified at the solitude she was left in, she started like a guilty thing, and sternly broke off the weird spell enthralling her, forcing her thoughts into other channels: feeling as if already she had wounded her self-respect in allowing fancy to wander so far; even the remembrance of that confession, in which she had once so gloried, was a sin now. Neither would it do too deeply to probe and analyse her just causes for misery and complaining, or despair would hopelessly rule her. If happiness were at an end, patient duty must be her chief consolation. She had been the maker of her own destiny. "*Fais ce que dois advienne que pourra,*" she said with pride, aloud, though she sat there alone—"A hard task, but it must be attempted!" Anil's gentle example—Sybil's pious counsels, for long and seriously she and Ermentrude had talked together a second time on that last evening—were already beginning their good work in her heart, only, as yet, she still trusted too much to herself—in her own strength. Poor, wrecked, aching spirit!

She leant her throbbing temples against the chair, closing her eyes as if to shut out sight and sound, hardly thinking, but remaining there in a passive, confused state of mind; and still

Digitized by Google

there, two hours after her arrival at Ellchurch, her maid, coming for orders, found her.

She drew her attention to her wet dress: the sight of her well-known face, and matter-of-fact remarks, recalled Mrs. Sherburne to herself. She lightly passed over her neglect of the circumstance, laughing at the woman's fears for the consequences of such careless risking. She went up-stairs, however, at Mrs. Martin's recommendation, allowed her to change her dress, and fetch vinegar for application to her hand. Taking little heed of her flurried exclamations at the extent of the injury, she lay silently on the sofa, whilst Martin bathed the sprain, relieving the monotony of her task with an occasional remark. Ermentrude never talked to her servants, and the Abigail's fussy observations bored her exceedingly.

Presently Martin left her side to bring her Eau de Cologne.

"Your head seems so very painful, ma'am," she said, compassionately. "Such a day for a journey! and travelling all by yourself, I wonder how you got through it. But a good night's rest will go far, I hope, to restore you."

Mrs. Sherburne felt so much in need of care and interest, even this slight remark of sympathy was grateful to her.

"There is a great deal to be got through before then, Martin," she said, good-naturedly, as she applied the scent to her temples: "my evening toilette, the dinner, and so forth, before bed-time comes."

Digitized by Google

"La, ma'am! surely you will never worry yourself dressing for dinner, but just have it comfortably in your boudoir? What a *mussy*" (Mrs. Martin's diction was somewhat peculiar), "'What a mussy,' says I to Mrs. Willis, just now, when I went after the vinegar, 'to think as how Master dines out to-night, and Mrs. Sherburne will be able to spend a quiet evening!' Quite a dispensation of Providence, in my opinion, ma'am," chatted Mrs. Martin.

Ermentrude started up from under her ministering hands as she heard this announcement of her husband's movements. She had sufficient self-control not to betray on the spur of the moment that it was news to her.

"On second thoughts she would not dress," was her only observation; and having allowed Mrs. Martin to talk on until she had discovered his destination, she checked her garrulity, and shortly afterwards dismissed her.

It was a real comfort to her when the waiting-woman had left the room; it made her so nervous lest Ralph, in his present mood, should come in whilst Martin was present. She shrunk from the more than ordinary coolness existing between them becoming a topic of gossip for the edification of their household.

But was he likely to come there?

As Martin quitted the apartment, Ermentrude fancied she had heard the sound of carriage-wheels crunching upon the gravel. She hastened to the window, it commanded a view of the approach: she had not been mistaken—it was

Digitized by Google

the carriage coming round. She saw her husband leisurely descend the long flight of steps, and enter it. It was nothing unusual for him to leave her without the courtesy of saying good-by, but he had never before left her in sullenness and anger. Her first feeling was wild distress; yet, with a sigh of relief, she watched him driven away. It was, after all, only a prolongation of suspense, a deferring of the trying interview that had to be got over; but it gave her time to rest and collect her thoughts, it left her free from dreading anticipation for a brief period. She turned from the window with a look of evident pleasure, yet a pang was at her heart that it should be so, and she felt very loveless and very lonely.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XIV.

It was late next morning when Ermentrude rose from her restless couch, where no refreshing sleep had come to restore her—where only a dozing kind of stupor had closed her eyelids, which, when past away, left her more wearily tired than before.

In this intermittent state of slumbering and waking she remained long after her usual hour of rising. She really felt ill; every limb ached: her cheek was feverish, her hands burning, her head oppressed with a leaden pain, depriving her of all clear power of thought.

"A sad pity! though it did not in the least surprise *her*, after driving home in an open *veheecle* through such pouring rain, and then sitting so long in her wet clothes—gentlefolks always were so thoughtless!" as Martin coolly remarked to her friend Mrs. Willis, when recounting how far from well she considered Mrs. Sherburne.

And, no doubt, she was suffering from her late exposure to rough weather and the great mental trials recently undergone.

But however little desire, or energy, Ermen-

Digitized by Google

trude possessed to move, she must rouse herself. Her husband was expected home at noon, and she must be ready to receive him. Her spirit rebelled against taking refuge in indisposition to avoid his reproaches; so, passively resigning herself into Martin's hands, she let her arrange her hair and dress her, and, once down-stairs again, occupied herself with a book which Sybil had given her at parting, accompanying the gift with an earnest entreaty that she would closely study its contents, taking the counsels it contained into her inmost heart. She opened it, hoping that the perusal might divert her thoughts from dwelling on her ailing sensations. She felt so unlike herself, it made her apprehensive.

The little volume in question was the *Christian Year*, so widely known to many; but Ermentrude had never met with it before.

"That almost *inspired* book"—as some appreciating writer has aptly named it—a work pre-eminently worthy of being placed side by side with the Bible and Prayer-book, those two great literary gifts, the one given by God, the other by man to man! For no truer guide-post has ever been raised to lead the soul aright in its daily, snare-beset path through this world's perilous wilderness, than the *Christian Year*. I suppose not all the books the world contains, fruit of the labours of the teeming brains of ancient or modern writers, secular or divine, have done as much to support the failing, cheer the unhappy, beautify everyday life, elevate the soul, and Christianise common duties, as the

Digitized by Google

*Christian Year*. The day of its publication deserves to be written in red letters in every household calendar; and if ever humanity merited canonisation for a good deed worked — the gratitude of a struggling world — the blessings of fellow-pilgrims — in my opinion that man is John Keble, the author of the *Christian Year*.

Even in the fitful attention which, in her then state of nervous anxiety, she could bestow on it, Ermentrude gleaned some consolation — some encouragement to high duty — from its pages.

The day proved long-drawn-out and exhausting. It was late in the evening before Mr. Sherburne made his appearance. When he did come he brought with him two friends, invited on from the house where he had been staying.

The arrival of these unexpected guests was announced to Ermentrude by a message. She saw nothing of her husband until she met him in their presence. They remained for some days at Ellchurch, and for several subsequent evenings there was additional company at dinner. Mr. Sherburne was addicted to getting up such impromptu parties — a habit Ermentrude had hitherto always encouraged — both, alas! considering anything preferable to a *tête-à-tête* evening spent together. But, with her heart little attuned to gaiety after the sad scene in which she had recently shared — in her present state of uncertainty — the misunderstanding existing between herself and husband — now, society and its requirements were very irksome to be endured. Still, outwardly, never before had she been more

Digitized by Google

admired or looked more singularly beautiful. Even Ralph was struck with her unusual animation and more than ordinary loveliness. The flush on her cheek—the wild light in her eye—the restless excitement of manner, which might have alarmed a more considerate observer—all tended in his eyes to enhance her good looks. He nearly forgave the "lugubrious dress" she wore, it set off to such advantage her wondrous beauty. He felt proud of the universal admiration she evidently excited. It even made him partially repent having placed a bar of separating coolness between them on the day of her return, which prevented his sharing the homage she called forth. Once erected, it was rather hard to remove without mutual concession, and Ermentrude had made no overture to restore peace between them, and, with all her attractions, was so impassively dignified, against his will she made him fear her. Moreover, he was in the habit of judging all women by the same standard; and his ideas being about equivalent to Mr. Punch's exalted measure of the qualifications and capabilities of the sex, he lived far too much in dread of "a scene" to attempt anything like reconciliation or explanation whilst friends were at hand to run the chance of witnessing it.

All day long she was left alone, struggling against the desertness of heart, the terrible grief which was preying on her soul. Every thought of gone-by happiness, all memory of the days so recently spent at Hammerton, repressed—never daring to think of those she had left behind



Digitized by Google

there, who had been so kind, so loving towards her: suffering—oh! during that long, miserable week, no one but her God and herself can ever know *how* she suffered! A long letter received from Anil her only comfort; even on that fearing to trust herself to dwell, for it was filled with allusions to the Rutherfords. The motto she had adopted to fight beneath was henceforth to be her one great code of action.

In the evening—no longer solitary—she mingled in society, talking and laughing with the gayest, a beautiful, fascinating, admired creature, so evidently indifferent to the admiration she evoked, her very callousness only deepened it.

Again in the solitude of her chamber—all disguise laid aside—all necessity for exertion over—jaded and worn—the face-mask of smiles removed—no one would have recognised her for the same being. Often she would lean out of the window, gasping for air to cool her brow—her head bowed down, her attitude despondent—then seek her pillow with that leaden weight still pressing on her brain, every sensation benumbed into confusion, and close her eyes with a longing wish that she might never re-open them.

"If any one had put a pistol to my head then, I should have been grateful to them," she told Sybil, when once, in after days, she spoke to her of this miserable season of sorrow and perplexity; the only time when, to any one, she was ever known to allude to it.

It was impossible for any frame to bear up

Digitized by Google

long against this artificial life; weak human nature could not endure such a continuous tension on every faculty—the perpetual, nervous dread which, like a lightning-charged cloud, hung broodingly over her. Even while she yet lived, existence seemed a dead, shadowy thing; so spiritless, so self-abased, in the course of a few days she had become!

During all this time her husband had only addressed her when necessity required it, never once making one uncalled-for remark. She had often longed to say, "Let bygones be bygones, and all peace again between us;" but he gave her no chance of carrying this bold decision into effect. Indeed, if the opportunity had ever presented itself, it required a fearless spirit to be the first to break the ice, when dealing with a man of Ralph Sherburne's sullen and revengeful disposition. There came an hour, however, when at length they were uninterruptedly left alone together.

It was on the evening of the day on which their guests had departed—the time, after dinner. The meal had been uncomfortable and cheerless enough; it seemed to Ermentrude to be interminable; it was ended at last—the servants withdrawn. As the door closed behind them, she knew the dreaded, yet longed-for, time of explanation had arrived. She was quite prepared for it. Even the racking pain in her head, which had victimised her for so many days, seemed all at once to leave her. She felt nerved for anything.

Digitized by Google

A dead pause ensued. Mr. Sherburne continued to eat dessert in ominous silence, as if collecting his powers for an attack; then he poured out another glass of wine.

"Ahem!" cried he, as, having drank it off, he put down his glass upon the table.

Ermentrude calmly prepared to listen.

"In hopes of receiving anticipated excuses, for some little time I have refrained from alluding to recent conduct on your part, which I consider it a mild term to call extraordinary," he began, with oppressively forced politeness; "as, however, you do not appear inclined to favour me with a voluntary explanation, I am left under the necessity of requesting one."

"Surely any one would say there were excuses to be made for my disobedience. I thought you must be totally unaware of the urgency of the summons I had received, accordingly I acted on my own responsibility. It really grieves me to have so greatly excited your displeasure."

"Much you thought about me, I dare say," muttered Mr. Sherburne, grimly; "your principle of action is, doubtless, an agreeable method for self-will to follow," he continued, sarcastically, aloud. "First go your own way, next come and humbly beg pardon for doing so. You feign penitence very prettily, Mrs. Sherburne; only add a few further protestations, to the effect that you will never again act as you have done, until the next time it suits you for doing so, and the perfection of your wife-like conduct will be complete."

Digitized by Google

"If you would only view the subject dispassionately you would, I am sure, be more indulgent in your judgment of me. My brother-in-law was so ill—dying; Anil, lacking the common necessaries of life, longing to see me," she said, pleadingly. "Oh, how I wish——"

"And how I wish you would not offend my ears by letting me hear you call that man brother," he interrupted, with rude impatience.

"My sister's husband," she substituted; "who is now dead and in his grave," with bitter emphasis she afterwards added.

"I wrote you word, if really in such want you might send them money."

"Money!" she scornfully repeated; "what is money worth in comparison to one look of sympathy—to one word of love?"

"Apparently to *you* everything, or has been so," was the polite rejoinder.

"Parables are beyond my comprehension," she said, contemptuously.

"The comprehension that will not comprehend is generally the dullest. Some people marry for one thing, some for another, that is all I would imply," he observed, with assumed *nonchalance*, evidently courting means of provocation.

"From this I can but presume you wish me to infer that, in your opinion, I married for the sake of money?" she asked, with cold self-possession, deliberately raising her eyes to his face as she spoke.

"As vanity cannot flatter me I was chosen

Digitized by Google

for my own sake, I naturally suppose Ellchurch to have been the attraction," he as coolly remarked, whilst daintily preparing an orange for eating.

"You overstate it," she said, in the same unnaturally composed manner which had characterised her during the whole dialogue; "yet, even presuming such to have been the case, you must hold me acquitted of all feigning there, at all events. From the first I candidly avowed I cared for you only as a cousin; I never, never professed to love you as you did me. You were content to accept my promise on those terms."

"Aye, I was fool enough then to be only too happy to win you on any . . . . A mere day-dream on my part, however, from which I rapidly awakened. I am as indifferent now as you would have me be."

She looked up again, so wildly. "Have a care, Ralph, how you say much more in this cruel strain: I cannot bear it a great deal longer."

"It pains, does it? well, you have no one but yourself to thank for the mortifying avowal. What have *you* ever done to retain my affections?"

She sighed heavily. "I have been very faulty,—with accusing regret I say so. The past is beyond my power to recall; I will try my best to atone for it in the future, if you will only let me do so."

He was exceedingly puzzled how to deal with her; she was so meek, so forbearing, so unlike her usual self. Had she assumed a haughty, repellent demeanour, as in previous disputes, he

Digitized by Google

could have met her with her own weapons; as it was, she had foiled him. There is nothing on earth so hard as to get up a quarrel with one who merely acts on the self-defensive, and refuses to be a *bonâ fide* belligerent.

Mr. Sherburne was strangely perplexed how to proceed. Should he bring his hand down with a crash upon the table, melodramatically, exclaiming—"Disobedience *is* disobedience, Mrs. Sherburne?" On second thoughts he doubted that being such a successful *coup-de-main;* probably to that very incontrovertible assertion Ermentrude would only quietly agree. Yet he wanted to quarrel it out. He was naturally inclined to be quarrelsome, and now panted for a quarrel—longed for a quarrel. Ermentrude had bitterly aggrieved him, yet he knew all the time he was visiting her offence far more heavily than it deserved. He required further tangible cause against her. He thought, if they had a regular good quarrel it might equalise matters between them; even, perchance, make it easier in the end to make up their disagreement. I do not mean to say Mr. Sherburne actually put these thoughts into the directly plain words that I have done, but such, if reduced to matter-of-fact speech, would have been the sum total of the ideas floating in his brain.

In short, a quarrel he needed, and was resolved to have. Finally, the better to carry out his aim, he went on another tack, requesting his wife to inform him—a smile of mockery curling his lips at Ermentrude's last speech—"who was

Digitized by Google

the writer of the moving epistle," so he expressed it, "whose pleadings were sufficiently powerful to set at nought the wishes of a husband?"

"Sybil Rutherford. I told you so in my letter."

"And have I not often told you I would have no communication held with those Rutherfords? Whenever that meddling, mischief-making old maid is at Holford, it gives me endless trouble to keep you asunder."

"Sybil is no mischief-making old maid."

"And as for that pharisaical, conceited brother of hers ——" continued Ralph, with malicious intent to anger.

"Nor Mr. Rutherford pharisaical and conceited, but an upright, honourable gentleman. I hate injustice!" exclaimed Ermentrude, indignantly.

"Knowing what a favourite he is, and ever was of mine, what cause I have to appreciate him, you may well credit the music your praises are to my ears."

"I hate injustice!" she repeated.

"As I do subterfuge. Why not honestly give your true reasons for constituting yourself the champion of the unjustly accused?"

"You are unjust to yourself now," she said, with pained reproach; "far more so than to Mr. Rutherford or me."

Another pause—he shrunk from pursuing the taunt. He did cordially hate Basil, was most absurdly jealous, and superficially, unfoundedly suspicious of him; but, even in his rage, he dared not insult Ermentrude with one

Digitized by Google

lowering insinuation or accusing word. He knew her moral rectitude, her high principles, too well ever to mistrust her. He thoroughly confided even in her feelings in his calmer moments, yet his antipathy against the Rutherfords was too great for him not to resort to every means that might oppose any attempt to renew her ancient friendship with them: but he owned her so trustful, it overruled the dictates of his jealous heart, and checked implied accusations which he well knew to be as false as they were unworthy.

"In my turn I have a question to put to you," said Ermentrude, at length resuming the conversation. "I have been told that Mr. Kirkland has addressed me twice, very recently; that my sister wrote to me for a whole year after I had ceased to receive her letters: can you throw any light on the singular fact, that not one of those communications ever reached me?"

"The fire is the best post-office for begging-petitions," he answered, imperviously.

"God help you, Ralph!"

"I acted for the best," he went on sullenly; "considering it desirable that after her imprudent marriage you should hold no communication with your sister, I fully realised the only way to keep you apart was entirely to separate you. If it had not been for that officious old woman's confounded interference, this would have been effectually brought to pass. It was your father's wish as well as mine," he wound up, in a sort of ungracious concession.

Digitized by Google

"If death had not so suddenly summoned my poor father, he would have lived to forgive Anil," she said, pityingly.

"I cannot say how that might be," he answered, testily. "Look you, Ermentrude," he continued, rising and going up to the fire; I am master in my own house, and intend to be so. We are both perfectly indifferent to one another—of that I am quite aware; but I am your husband all the same, and I mean you to obey me. I will have no communication with those Rutherfords, and, as long as your sister is under their roof, none with her. Let what has now occurred be a good lesson to you for the future."

"Let me understand," she said, passing her hand over her forehead, looking bewilderingly round, as if she felt giddy. "Do you mean that I must not write to Anil?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Will you let me ask her here?"

He turned sharply round,—

"Mrs. Sherburne, there is but one chance left, that I can see, for you and me to live the rest of our days in anything approaching to happiness, and that is separation," he exclaimed, now thoroughly exasperated.

She started up, that strange, unearthly look again in her eyes. She moved on a few steps, holding out her hands straight and rigid as if she were sightless, and groping along a perplexed dark path. "We have stood together very long, let us continue so to the end. What is it

Digitized by Google

you would have me do?—only tell me," she said, confusedly.

"I *have* told you," he said, sternly. "There is such perfect incompatibility of temper and disposition between us, I see nothing else to be done." (I do him the justice to say he was looking the other way, and did not notice the scared look on her face.) "Neither of us caring for the other, estranged in heart, it would be better for both to be estranged in reality!"

"Ralph! what are you saying? For God's sake have some mercy! The room seems whirling all round and round with me. Oh, my head! Let us be friends, or you will kill me!"

He had worked himself up into a towering passion, and now his anger had quite outpassed the bounds of government.

"Never again, I tell you! Never!—never!"

Frantic with rage, he hurled out rather than spoke the words, and then abruptly rushed from the apartment.

That night, when Ermentrude laid her head upon her pillow, the agonising pain weighed down her brow with still heavier leaden pressure. Her temples throbbed, until she seemed to hear their torturing pulses sounding in the silence of the night-watches. Worn out with fatigue, yet unable to close her eyes in sleep, strange, wandering fancies filled her mind. By the dim light of the night-lamp she seemed to see shadowy figures stealing about the room—well-known faces mournfully gazing at her through the curtains: some yet living, some whom she knew to

Digitized by Google

have been long, long dead, speaking to her in voices whose words she could not catch, strain every sense as she might to comprehend what they were expressing. The night wore on; still more perplexed became her brain, more rapidly beat her heart, more feverishly excited she grew, each moment her nervous imaginings becoming wilder.

Alone, with no one near to soothe her troubled heart, or calm her bewildering thoughts, she strove to collect her ideas and restrain her mind in order; but vainly.

She knew not how or when consciousness sank into complete derangement; but when Martin came into the room next morning she found Ermentrude sitting up in bed, her eyes glittering with fever-light, talking to herself rapidly and with rambling incoherence.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XV.

In stern, frozen silence, Ralph Sherburne entered the sick chamber, and, standing by the bedside of his wife, looked down upon his work. If remorse were busy at his heart, it was unbetrayed; if pity filled his breast, it was unspoken.

Manifesting neither dread nor pleasure at sight of him, Ermentrude appeared quite unconscious of his presence: her mind evidently was solely absorbed in one idea—all her delirious ravings turned on Anil. Now, she would fancy her sister to be actually in the room, yet prevented from approaching her. "Ralph!" she often cried out, "was forcing her back, ordering her away, whilst Anil was imploring him to let her remain; yet still he refused her request, still persisted in taking her from the room."

"He was sending Anil away, very far away, from her—away for ever," she would drearily whisper: "she should never look upon her dear face in this world any more. It was very cruel of him to wish to separate them thus," she sadly moaned. "She was not to see Anil or write to her, she must remember that; if she did, Ralph

Digitized by Google

would kill her: he had said so—no, not kill her," confusedly she would ramble on; "but something very dreadful was to happen if she disobeyed him: she could not exactly remember what he meant to do. Would no one tell her what it was?"

Then she would imagine herself at Roland Kirkland's funeral; and solemnly would repeat aloud, with fixed, intent gaze, the words of the Burial Service, making the hearts of her hearers tremble with awe at the serious, impressive manner in which she uttered them:—"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." She would dwell upon this portion, saying it over and over, beyond all the rest, seemingly musing upon it, weighing it in all the depth of its mighty significance.

Or, again, she would believe Anil to be dying of want and starvation, and she withheld from aiding her, perplexedly mingling up their respective situations with the parable of Lazarus and Dives, until, her frenzy increasing, she would entreat her husband with piteous earnestness to revoke his hard decree, and shriek out her sister's name in clear, shrill accents; one wild delusion following the other in rapid, grievous succession. Her words mournful, heart-touching things to hear.

And all the while Ralph Sherburne sat near, stolidly listening to her frantic tones; his eyes riveted on her, the thoughts of his heart jealously guarded within his lips: he scarcely ever left her room.

Digitized by Google

The fever ran higher: her medical attendants looked grave, and bodingly shook their heads. The household considered Ermentrude's days were numbered; her doctors unanimously concurred in pronouncing some great mental emotion to have been the cause of her illness; her husband persisted in solely ascribing it to the effects of her long drive through the rain, and her neglect in not changing her wet garments. They suggested, as most advisable, that if Mr. Sherburne was aware who was the lady on whom his wife so often called, she should at once be sent for: it was probable her presence might tend further to calm the mind, and prove of more serviceable benefit than all their professional attendance or remedies. But this advice could not be followed without many a hard further struggle with the stubborn heart. Ralph still watched on, deferring to obey their words. The bystanders commiserated with him.

"Mr. Sherburne was quite stunned with his grief," sympathisingly they said.

"Now he was likely to lose his wife, he began to discover her value," Mrs. Martin severely added, with a reproachful toss of her head.

And still Ermentrude called distractedly on Anil—her absorbing thought—to the extinction of everybody else, and of all other interests.

"Was there no hope?" in hollow accents Ralph asked at last, as he gazed upon the wasted form and now exhausted sufferer battling with death.

But little. Mrs. Sherburne had naturally a

Digitized by Google

strong constitution; that was in her favour. The crisis was approaching—fear must be entertained for the result, her life hung on a very slender thread.

For a little while longer Ralph stood beside her, in troubled uncertainty, a few moments, which seemed to him an eternity. She looked desolately up in his face, for the first time seeming to recognise him, murmuring very plaintively, almost in her natural voice,—"Please let Anil come to me." He could bear it no more, the sorrowful tones of her voice quite subdued him.

"I *will* send for her—I will, indeed; only, Ermentrude, be calm: don't let me live with the burden on my soul that I have been your murderer:" he whispered the last words bending down low over her, so that none else could hear him. Then hurried away, fearing to trust himself further, and on the feeling of the moment wrote and despatched without delay, by special messenger, the letter summoning Anil to Ellchurch.

Some dawn of comprehension apparently glimmered upon Ermentrude's mind—her eyes followed him as he left the room; and though she still talked on excitedly, her words were less wild, her voice less frenzied. An hour later she sank into a heavy slumber.

Merely another proof added to the many that fall under the cognizance of every one, during their onward travelling through life, conclusively evidencing how fruitless the task for one human

Digitized by Google

being to attempt fixing the bounds of connexion between the destinies of individuals, in this world of strange affinities and mutable relationships. With the limited foresight and blindfolded judgment of finite capacity, to strive to be the arbiter of the destiny of fellow-mortals, when totally unacquainted with what may be the will of an inscrutable Providence regarding them. A presumptuous attempt at selfish, interfering government, to which humanity is specially prone, and one which it most generally lives to see come to nought: completely overturned, ofttimes to its own endless mortification and confusion, more rarely to its regretful repentance; frequently brought about by strange ways, impossible to ward off, as being inconceivable to bounded vision; useless to grapple against, as emanating from a Power stronger than it, who unawares subdues.

That a train of circumstances should ever have occurred obliging Ralph Sherburne to break his manifold resolutions, contradict his own words, and welcome Anil Kirkland within his doors, was not one of the least confirming tests how fruitless it is to lay down any fixed resolutions despotically to rule the future, when it is so impossible to predict what accidents to thwart our plans any day may bring forth, nor one of the slightest of the daily failures of the impotent manœuverings of egotistical pride, the annals of the private life of individuals have had to chronicle.



Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XVI.

Six years have passed away; though deficient in startling incident, not without bringing some change in their onward flow to those whose lives I am recording.

Standing upon the threshold of womanhood, Ermentrude Kirkland and Grace Holford are now bidding adieu to childhood and entering upon the realities of existence: respectively they have attained the ages of seventeen and nineteen. Grace has grown up a beautiful creature, a brilliant, captivating woman, full of health and spirits; whilst Uda, much the same as when many years younger, is an intelligent, lady-like girl, quiet and unassuming, amiable, gentle, and loveable, old in character with fixed opinions beyond her years, possessing much depth and sincerity in her nature, but by many considered too cold and tranquil. She is still Basil Rutherford's charge, for Uda is an orphan now. As she foretold, very soon Anil slept beside her husband in her peaceful grave. Basil is staunchly true to his trust; greatly he loves the child he has pledged himself to tend and care for. She had been the first object that had

Digitized by Google

succeeded in re-exciting his dormant interests, and had partially filled up a great gap there had been for years within his heart. His first feeling had been gratitude to Uda for awakening his sympathies and softening his feelings: by degrees this measured regard had ripened into affection.

Basil has grown to look much older. The hard, care-betraying lines, have deepened round his mouth and on his brow, yet Sybil is of opinion he is more satisfied in spirit than had previously been the case for years; for he has, as I have already said, found a distinct object in life on which once more to expend his zeal and interest; and I agree with Sybil in thinking, that to be possessed of such is far more upholding to human nature, more exhilaratingly contenting in effect, than all the abstract interests we may create from sought-out materials wherewith to force ourselves into busy occupation in which to swallow up our days, so as imperfectly to fill the void, or drown the bitter sense of loss experienced when any sun or star of hope has gone down for ever before ourselves in our career.

Sybil is evenly pursuing the progressive tenour of her way; the flight of years takes nothing from her, though, good and faithful servant, many are the exemplary deeds, the kind, unselfish works, which the gone-by months have registered in her favour.

And what of Ermentrude Sherburne? what of her husband? We left her in so much danger

Digitized by Google

—Ralph under the mollifying influence of repentant sorrow.

How was it with them? Did Ermentrude die or live? Was Ralph's penitence evanescent or life-continuing?

She lived, and — alas for the stability of good resolutions! — Ralph's repentance was but of very short duration.

When Mrs. Sherburne re-opened her weary eyes, it was to find Anil watching beside her. Breathing a heavy sob of relief, she turned a look of loving gratitude upon the gentle face bending over her, murmured a few words of grateful thankfulness, then, too weak to talk, sank again into a prolonged and lighter slumber. From that she woke, weak, helpless as a child, requiring much care and caution to insure recovery; but the fever had left her, and hope was the prevailing feeling of her chastened heart—hope, dispelling fear. It was yet long, however, before she could leave her room — still longer before she regained any approach to her ordinary strength. During all this lengthened-out period of gradual recovery Anil was her faithful, patient nurse.

With her good, kind sister for companion, during this time of repose and convalescence, Ermentrude passed a season of cheerful, tender happiness, such as she had never before experienced since. Ellchurch had become her home. After awhile her little namesake joined her mother there — Anil could not be so long sepa-

Digitized by Google

rated from her daughter. The child brought additional sunshine to the household. Ralph Sherburne, fortunately, took a fancy to Uda; it amused him to talk to her, and hear her quaint, pertinent remarks. Her presence took off the *gêne* which still he felt, and, it is to be feared, betrayed, as feeling in Anil's society. But, on the whole, they got on pretty well together.

Anil remained at Ellchurch until Ermentrude's health was quite renewed; then the Sherburnes went abroad to pass the autumn in Italy, and the sisters parted. Anil looked so fragile and delicate, her complexion had grown so transparent, her form so attenuated, her whole appearance so spiritualised, that to Ermentrude's loving eyes she hardly seemed as if she could belong to earth. Mrs. Sherburne did not put her apprehensions into words, but her heart sank within her as she spoke her adieux. Her fears were not without foundation. Within the first year of her widowhood Anil Kirkland lay in the grave, "her union made perfect for ever" with her heart's beloved! whilst Ermentrude was being gradually restored to beauty and health—but not to happiness, so little faith is to be placed on momentary impressions, on the stability of feelings solely called into being beneath the pressure of excitement and passing causes, in place of the steady, slow growth of conviction. The erring conduct, the self-willed actions of years, are not to be amended in a day; and it is far easier to fall back into an old, faulty path, which has become habitual, than bravely trudge on in a strange

Digitized by Google

and novel way, requiring constant vigilance, and a watch set over every step and word. In middle age it is no slight task to attempt the uprootal of long-established faults—no easy endeavour to effect a reform. As the influence of alarm to keep conscience alive and awaken regret died away within Ralph Sherburne's heart, he once more became requiring, harsh, impatient towards his wife, and difficult to please; and though gratitude for the mercy that had snatched her from the jaws of death did not equally die out in Ermentrude's heart, though she did much to atone for the past, to a greater degree bearing patiently with his unkindness, striving to soften him and to endure all things, she was not allowed to dissipate the baneful effects of the evil workings of her own hands, nor permitted to restore former things to their ancient level.

Our acts bring their own unfailing judgments in their train, and though repentance for them may be accepted, their pernicious consequences are frequently ordained to be ever present with us, to follow our footsteps to the grave—an earthly purgatory of expiation!

Struggle as Ermentrude now might to be gentle and forbearing, she could not undo the past. Disregarded responsibilities, wasted means of influencing for good, wifely meekness and obedience unpractised for years, are heavy sins for which to be answerable. Neglected opportunities are poisonous seeds to sow in the path of home-life—seeds of rapid growth and plenteous fruitfulness, the harvest of which a lifetime

Digitized by Google

will scarcely suffice to reap, and for which a life-time alone is meet retribution. And these were on her soul!

In the early years of their married life she might have gained power over Ralph,—done much to raise his tastes and remould his habits: a false step on the threshold of the lot she had *voluntarily* sought out to make her own had to be very dearly paid for.

> "Doth each day upon its wing,
> Its allotted burden bring?
> Load it not beside with sorrow,
> Which belongeth to to-morrow."

Simple lines! but much benefit may be extracted from them, whenever we may be feeling inclined to look on coming days with gloomy apprehension, or, as they of little faith, be taking anxious thought for the morrow.

> "Strength is promised, strength is given,
> When the heart by God is riven;
> But foredate the day of woe,
> And alone thou bear'st the blow."

Ermentrude *had* foredated hers; she could not aid her sister, she lacked trust to abandon her to the care of Him who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the ravens. She forgot that if He had needed her feeble assistance as the instrument to work out His will, He would have placed her in a position to render her such. "The strength of my own arm shall bring salvation" had been her presumptuous cry. She loaded her morrow with a self-burdened trial,

Digitized by Google

unsent to her; no strength came with it, as shield, to enable her to meet it—she solely gathered a bitter reward.

After her illness, for a little while, Ralph was kind and attentive; by degrees, as I have said, the course of things again returned to their old train, the estrangement between them only widening from the forlorn attempt that had been made to remove it. Perhaps it was not wholly his fault. The greater blame, no doubt, lay in his selfishness—his violent temper. But Ermentrude was by no means a model woman yet—she had faults left, and great ones; besides, she was too fastidious and exclusive. Then, she did not—could not—love him! there rested the true source of incapability to restore solid peace and harmony between them; and all things seemed to run counter to her endeavours, and foil her good intentions. She became discouraged; finding she could not, all at once, nullify the past, gradually she discontinued any attempt at doing so. As time sped on Ralph grew more tyrannical, Ermentrude more indifferently unresisting; until at length, if the same roof still sheltered their heads, they were otherwise entirely separated. They saw but little of each other—there was no dissembling between them. If he was in a good temper, they were coldly polite. If anything happened to put him out, he gave way to high words and cutting remarks, to which she listened with a lofty, supreme contempt. There was no attempt now at a common interest—no semblance of affection maintained

Digitized by Google

by them. Their unsuitability and disagreement became known to everybody. Mr. Sherburne was constantly from home. Ermentrude passed her time in strict seclusion; rarely quitting Ellchurch, living the life of a recluse, spending her days in a forced routine of constant employment, heaping occupation on occupation, allowing no space for thought to analyse her feelings or dwell upon her unhappiness, gradually imbibing more exalted notions of the great aims, the true purposes for which life is bestowed upon us. But her way was bleak and lonely: and the heavy cross she had assumed a heavy burden to bear along the straitened, irksome path she daily trod. So, "biding the pelting of the pitiless storm," she remained. If her heart was no longer shut up in lonely apartness from her kind—if she had learnt to feel for, and weep with, the meanest, now sorrow had touched its well-springs — considering what an enduring, wrestling life she led, how severed from all communion with the outer world, it was not surprising that, whilst her inner heart had expanded in love and warmth, Ermentrude had also grown somewhat eccentric in her ways, and that, in exterior manner, she should have become sterner and colder.

And John Vaughan?

For several years John has been busily engaged learning practical farming, with two or three other young gentlemen, whose ambition, like his own, is centred on becoming British agriculturists. John is now about to start on

Digitized by Google

his own firm, an excellent opening having been obtained for him, through the kindness of Basil Rutherford. The world is going prosperously with John. True to his former protestations of abiding allegiance to Ermentrude Kirkland, to his honour be it spoken, she was still the one bright particular star of his destiny.

Faithful to one object for seven long years! Rare, meritorious instance of man's constancy!

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XVII.

Richard Leigh was sitting in the mahogany parlour at Holford Manor-house. A quaint little room, still retaining the bygone appellation of bygone days; a comfortable little room too, spite of the sombre mahogany panelling from whence it derived its name, with its cumbrous, twisted-legged furniture, its heavy cabinets, its moulded ceiling, well-stored bookcases, its old-fashioned damask hangings, and china monsters.

The Leighs were Grace Holford's tenants at the Manor. By the tenour of her father's will she was not allowed to reside there whilst under age, but bound to let the place; though after the attainment of her majority a tenant was with equal strictness forbidden.—Like the Czars of Russia, the Holfords were addicted to laying restrictive injunctions and arbitrary commands upon their successors.

Time seemed to hang oppressively on the hands of Richard. He swung his leg pendulum fashion over the arm of his chair, turning his eyes up in vacant scrutiny upon the pattern of the ceiling; he walked to the window and looked out upon the autumnal prospect; he shifted his

Digitized by Google

position with wondrous versatility,—all in vain; he took up a book, skimmed a page or two, and with an alarming yawn put it down; then drew out his cigar-case and slowly conned over the treasures it contained, sniffed their fragrance with evident relish, gazed admiringly on their prim regularity; then, his fingers lovingly lingering amongst them, half drew one out—shook his head, heaved a sigh—and replaced the case in his pocket; he poked up the fire, and then flattened it. An unmistakeable look of excessive relief crossed his handsome face when he heard the door open, and some one enter to interrupt his solitude.

"Well, Mary!"

"Well, Richard!"

"What a time you have been away! I really began to think you were never coming back again," he exclaimed, indulging in another very audible yawn. "What *have* you been doing with yourself?"

"Only calling at Grantham Cottage."

"Those fat, over-fed horses creeping like tortoises, I suppose, in the usual steady, dowager pace in which my worthy aunt delights to drive. Slow progress, Mary, or else what an interminable call!"

"As it happens, we went quicker than usual, and paid the ordinary length of an afternoon visit. We have been home again quite half an hour, only the evening felt so pleasant, I stayed to take a few turns on the terrace, as I found no one wanted me."

Digitized by Google

"*I* did," he said, abruptly.

She coloured with evident delight, but checking the impulse, laughingly made him a mock reverential curtsey.

"Why are you standing so respectfully in the distance, just like Mrs. Holmes when she comes to receive orders?"

"Because I must go away directly to receive mine."

"Nonsense! they don't want you; have you not just told me so? Besides, you *are* receiving yours. Your first duty, if only I could make you sensible of the fact, is to amuse me."

"Thanks for the information. I fear Mrs. Leigh would hardly be persuaded to consider it in the same light when she pays me my wages." Yet, as she spoke, Mary drew nearer to him.

"I wish to Heaven you would learn to gloss things over a little better! 'Pays you your wages,' indeed!" he repeated, pettishly.

"To what end?—wages they are, and hardly earned besides. I often envy the kitchen-maid. Call things by their right names always, Richard; it eases life greatly. The fault of this luxurious age is that prettily glossing over of palpable facts. I would far rather dig for the coarsest, scantiest daily bread, than eat these rolls of dependence!"

"I would not lead the life you do, Mary, for very much," he said, musingly considering her.

"Poor, dependant thing!—poverty-stricken by no fault of my own—who would exchange with me?" she passionately answered.

"You had far better have taken my advice,

Digitized by Google

when we were boy and girl together—before I grew worldly; by circumstances constrained and hampered to act against my natural will—what I am, in short—it would have been better for both of us," he rambled on confusedly, in a low, nervous voice.

She shook her head.

"I doubt it; at all events, we will not allude to it to-night," she said, hurriedly.

"Did you have a pleasant drive?"

"No."

"Has Mrs. Leigh been scolding you?"

"For three-parts of the way without mercy."

"I thought as much when I heard of that walk in the shrubbery. 'This *delicious* afternoon!'" he repeated, mimickingly. "Nasty, chilly October evening! The more reason, then, for you to give her time to recover her temper. Leave her for once to take care of herself; stay here, and give me an account of your visit: I want to hear all about these unknown people from unprejudiced lips, before being inundated with Mrs. Leigh's rapturous approbation and vapidly pretty speeches respecting them . . . Well, if you will not begin I must," he went on, seeing she hesitated. "You started from this door, Mrs. Leigh scolding you all the way, because your dress of wren-like brown and simple straw bonnet looked far prettier than her gay brocade and plumed head-dress—you will excuse me calling it a bonnet—we like things called by their right names, Mary: we quite agreed on that point, you know. You reached Grantham Cot-

Digitized by Google

tage . . . now take up my theme, I can follow it no further. What live lions were to be seen when you got there?"

"One old lady and two young ones, a cat, a dog, two canaries, and a dormouse."

"A drawing-room edition of the Happy Family! How provoking you are!"

"The old lady was knitting, one young lady drawing, the other seemingly engaged in disturbing the domestic peace and quiet, by setting the dog at the cat—at least, I judge it to be so, from the singular sounds that greeted our ears as we passed up the anteroom, and from the circumstance of finding her sitting on the ground with the dog barking in her arms, and the witch-like attitude of the cat in a distant corner, when we entered the apartment."

"I like the idea, and shall adopt it the next wet day. Would that I had had a dog and cat here this evening! The name of this young lady was——?"

"Miss Holford. She would have made a lovely picture as she rose to receive us, with her dishevelled ringlets, heightened colour, the unstudied grace of her attitude, and the picturesque little dog beside her."

"Why, Mary, I have not heard you so enthusiastic for many a long day! Then Miss Holford is not a fright, or crooked, or redhaired, after the fashion of heiresses?"

"On the contrary, an exquisitely beautiful creature, pleasing in manner, winning in her

Digitized by Google

ways. So decidedly lovely, there is no doubt about the matter."

"I must, without further delay, go and call at Grantham Cottage."

"Miss Holford," said she, "told me you had already met," said Mary, hesitatingly.

"Bewitching creature! did she, really? What made her mention my name? Do tell me all about it, my dear Mary. You are really very tantalising with your snatches of information."

"Do not flatter yourself; it was not any inquiry emanating from the fair heiress that made you the subject of our conversation," said Mary, sharply. "A casual remark of Mrs. Leigh's introduced your name, and, by way of something to say to me, it was continued by Miss Holford."

"Just so; 'by way of something to say,' you know" (imitating her); "and for the same reason, repeat to me the information," said Richard, looking hopelessly conceited.

"Oh, the vanity of man! Do you remember telling me of two young ladies who last year, when you were staying at Mr. Chichester's, in the course of a walk, you met in a state of alarm, from being unable to shake off the society of a poor idiot youth, who, under the delusion they were relations of his own, had accosted them, and was impeding their further progress?"

"Quite well. I gallantly rushed to the rescue, and soon escorted them beyond his reach."

Digitized by Google

"Those two young ladies were Miss Holford and her cousin."

"You don't mean to say so! Why, that beautiful girl has been the object of my heart's devotion ever since! And that was Miss Holford, the heiress? What a fool I was not to guess it by intuition!"

"As she was on a visit at a friend's house, and far away from her native place, I should have taken you for something more than canny if you had done so."

"And so she contrived to find out who I was? Whilst in my search after her identity she completely baffled me! What wonderful penetrating detectives you women are! I feel immensely gratified, Mary."

"Miss Kirkland is a nice-looking girl; and the old lady a cheerful, agreeable person."

"I make no doubt of it—Kirkland?" he said, musingly. "I wonder, now, if I could trace any relationship between her and my revered step-parent? The name is the same:—"Which was the daughter of John, which was the son of James, which was the brother of George," &c. &c., and the thing is done! A sixtieth cousinship, if it could possibly be established, would be an invaluable help!"

"For what purpose?"

"To win an heiress and a beauty. I see a brilliant prospect opening before me. I should make an excellent country gentleman," he resumed, finding Mary made no answer. "This old rattle-trap manor-house isn't a bad locality,



Digitized by Google

and you would soon see, if the world went prosperously with me, I should get on well enough in the county. It is only because, with all my limited means, I am more popular than themselves, that the men about here don't like me. They will love me more dearly than ever if I enter the lists, and carry her off for my own in the face of them. Tell me, would Miss Holford suit me, think you, Mary?"

"Are you seriously thinking of this, Richard?" she asked, slowly raising her eyes scrutinisingly to his face.

"That is making a joke suddenly earnest; you should never ask such direct questions. Yet what could I do better? Beggars may not be chosers, and if I marry at all, I must marry where there is money. This age of luxury requires means. Three hundred a-year for housekeeping sounds pretty enough in theory, but in practice!—whew! *My forte* is not self-sacrifice. You give your consent, of course?" he added, carelessly.

"Do you need it? Of course, then, if requisite, provided you are happy, what does it matter to me?—what *can* it matter?"

"'What *can* it matter to me?'" he repeated slowly. "Mary, you are an icicle—so repressing!"

"Only I should have thought," she went on, heedless of his interruption, "that with such good prospects before you, it had hardly been necessary to degrade your self-respect by marrying for money."

Digitized by Google

"Strong language, Miss Leigh!" he said, with vexation.

"But no less true. It is a ceaseless, wearing fetter of obligation for a man voluntarily to assume; it places him in a humiliating, wrong relation with his wife at starting, and is a vexing perplexity in matrimonial felicity to the end."

"Expectations in the future are moonshine; we all know what a delusive hope it is to depend on the caprice of a will."

"You have hands, brains, and strength; work, then, and achieve an independence. The rest earned by toil is the most sweet and refreshing of any."

"Many thanks. I considerably prefer the easily-acquired competency."

"In that case you cannot do better than marry Miss Holford. She is beautiful, rich, and apparently amiable: only—you must first win her."

"Never fear for me there. Though what does it matter to you?" he said, still harping on her former speech. "I am sorry it does not matter, Mary: are you prepared to abide by the consequence of your own words?"

A servant came in to say Mrs. Leigh wished to speak to Mr. Richard. This trifling occurrence interrupted a conversation which was gradually leading on in a very different direction to its previous spirit; on such minute hinges the probabilities of our fate ever turn.

Mary smiled provokingly at his look of vexation; but when he was quite, quite gone,

Digitized by Google

she knelt down, and rested her head on the table; a few bitter tears welling forth: so she remained for a little while.

She soon grew calm again; and when Mrs. Leigh shortly afterwards joined her, submitted uncomplainingly to a long lecture on inattention to her duties; then meekly proceeded to write notes for her, and execute divers other requirements, until it was time to dress for dinner. Played and sang afterwards; brought her a footstool, and fetched her a shawl; did as she was told, came as she was bid, obliging and placid as ever—a very model of a poor dependant on the bounty of a rich relation; whilst Richard, seemingly unconscious of her presence, indifferent to her treatment, indolently reclined in the most comfortable chair the room possessed, absorbed in the perusal of an abstruse article in the last *Quarterly Review*.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XVIII.

With mushroom growth a friendship sprang into existence between Grace Holford and Mrs. Leigh —at least, if such may be dignified by the name, which consisted in a constant interchange of meals and visits, a repeated passing between of little notes, and to and fro of pony-carriages.

The sort of thing suited Grace well enough. She found her new acquaintance a great help towards enlivening the dulness of the cottage, a wondrous alleviation to the heaviness with which time usually hung on hand with her there. The rational pursuits of her aunt and cousin were little to her taste. Idling her days away at the Manor-house was a far more congenial pastime than improving the shining hours with work or reading; instructing Mrs. Leigh in new stitches of knitting or crochet, more amusing than teaching charity-children in the schools; and training up Richard in the paths of good advice, than attending to the moral deficiencies of her poorer neighbours.

Mrs. Leigh, on her part, was charmed. It gratified her vanity to patronise the heiress. She courted her society, therefore, to the utmost,

Digitized by Google

and succeeded in establishing it as a matter of course that, at least, two or three times a-week, Grace should spend the day at Holford Manor. She was nothing loth, as I have already implied, to be so persuaded.

Mrs. Leigh's gossiping chatter amused her. Her little peculiarities were a source of never-failing excitement. And if that worthy woman did occasionally give the cut direct to her *h*'s, and was not the most refined of her species, she was so good-natured and talkative, Grace considered her merits, abundantly covered a host of such trivial sins.

Mary, the lively heiress voted a bore; her taciturnity, her quiet movements, she found oppressive. She gave her the *soubriquet* of "the Bat." "She was always flitting about," she said, in explanation, "in a kind of uncertain, twilight atmosphere; in her puzzled-headed way struggling after light; a tiresome, annoying thing, and yet so difficult to knock down, catch, or be got rid of!" On Richard, Miss Holford had never been heard to pass any public opinion. Yet a piquant flirtation was actually going on between them if nobody else perceived the one ever heed the other.

They seldom talked together, excepting in society. He never, in every-day life, singled her out from the rest; still he was perpetually hovering near her; and, though seemingly so indifferent, not one word they respectively spoke in the other's presence escaped their hearing, not a movement passed unnoticed. Both were

Digitized by Google

conscious it was so. It made Richard the constant subject of Grace's thoughts. It increased his influence over her. Alas! she weakly yielded to the feeling, never attempting to win a victory over self. How this unconscious understanding had been first established, it is hard to say. It often annoyed her; yet, after a fashion, pleased. Any way, she had not courage to break through it. To her it seemed an enthralling spell, fascinating against her will. She would sometimes lament over it to herself; sometimes laugh, and say it was mesmeric influence on his part. Maybe, in that surmise she was not exactly wrong. In wishing to establish power, his force of will had, no doubt, unconsciously coerced *her* will beneath its stronger sway.

The moment Richard Leigh entered the room, Miss Holford felt herself no longer a free agent; her careless freedom of deed and word gone, she spoke and acted with measured attention. Yet even Mary's jealous, investigating watchfulness, was at fault, and she was persuaded into believing her cousin had only been joking in the determination which he had announced of entering the lists, and winning the hand of the heiress. To her, Richard continued kind and gentle as ever; often consulting her, and talking (as she imagined) openly, about himself and his concerns—as openly, certainly, as Richard Leigh could ever talk to any one; always showing her, as was his wont, more respect and appreciation, in a thousand undemonstrative ways, than he evinced towards any other; and no homage is

Digitized by Google

so dear and winning to women's hearts as that silent betrayal of esteem and acknowledgment of their worth, that implied sense of their superiority over other women. They value it far above mere admiration or empty love; and that is, in reality, the true object of attainment alike by high-minded or frivolous characters.

On the whole, Mary felt more light-hearted and hopeful than had been the case for many years, though it would have puzzled any one to say why. A stranger, truly, can never meddle in a heart's joys, or comprehend their origin. It would, indeed, require superhuman scrutiny to trace to their all but imperceptible wellsprings the sources of human gladness, from such trifles they so often rise, gathering strength and confirmation in their onward flow. The flattering tale of Hope is, however, too common a tale, whereon descanting, to waste time and patience.

Mary considered Grace a desperate coquette and sincerely returned her antipathy, but lulled herself into the pleasant security that there was safety in the smiles she so readily bestowed on all, consequently no cause for fear.

But this soothing state of feeling was of recent growth; it was not so the first time her cousin and Grace had met in her presence. Many a bitter moment had the poor dependant endured then. The meeting had taken place at a dinner-party, when Richard had been Miss Holford's most humble servant: they had laughed and flirted unceasingly, even to the drawing down a gentle rebuke on Grace next

Digitized by Google

morning from Aunt Sybil—too good-natured an old maid, and at all times delighting to see young people enjoy themselves, to be very prone to visit severely every flight of youthful spirits, or be given to damp their enjoyment by solemn lectures.

Since that evening Richard had taken but little notice of her. He was playing out his game with much intuitive perception into her character. Perhaps, had he continued his open attentions, he would have been little regarded; as it was, he was so tantalisingly uncertain, so provokingly indifferent, he was making steady progress in monopolizing her thoughts. By straining her attention his aim appeared to be, to bait her into feeling.

There was a want of expansion—a want altogether of a something nice in his nature, more to be felt when with him than described in absence, which made Richard Leigh by no means a loveable person; nevertheless, Grace was beginning to care for him after a fashion, or to persuade herself she did so, for he had captivated her fancy, if not her heart. That, maybe, had she cared deliberately to investigate its condition, was not entirely at her own disposal, or it might have been worse with her than it now stood.

Thus far it had been plain sailing, Richard had had everything his own way; but it so happened, John Vaughan was coming to Grantham for a Christmas visit.

"What would then occur?—what then?"

Digitized by Google

was the question Richard would often savagely ask his *head.* By a slip of the pen, I was on the point of writing—his heart!

He had been present when the letter had been received announcing the acceptance of Sybil's invitation by the expected guest; he had noted the flush of pleasure with which the intelligence had involuntarily dyed Grace's fair cheeks; he pondered long upon the circumstance, and quite made up his mind, in the course of his sagacious twistings of reasoning from far-fetched inferences, that a more than probable competitor was about to appear on the scene. In his abstruse calculations, Richard reckoned it a considerable advantage in this rival's favour that he would be domiciled in the same house with Grace, probably for some weeks. This last he considered the most formidable obstacle to encounter. He never for an instant dreamed that Grace's still, unremarkable little cousin, could ever be another man's idol when the wealthy beauty was near at hand!

Richard only felt he must make up his mind whether he really intended to pursue the chase. He glanced at Mary—hesitated—and finally decided to let another week go by before he definitively made up his mind. Meanwhile, Mrs. Leigh was to be persuaded into giving a ball, for which she must fill the Manor-house, striving to secure Grace, amongst other guests, to stay there for it.

The chances would be more equal then, if seriously he entered the lists with his presumed

Digitized by Google

opponent. In the interval he should see him, judge if there really were any cause for fear—judge if he could resign Mary for ever and aye, by indissolubly uniting his fate to another.

So argued selfish, covetous Vanity.

The struggle between love and interest, often previously handled in play, was, for the first time in his life, seriously beginning with Richard Leigh.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE decision was arrived at long before the allotted period. Richard's share of the contents of the Holford post-bag was of unusual preponderance during the intervening week. There was a uniform character in the appearance and tenour of the communications of his numerous correspondents, by no means agreeable to his repose. So many demands for Christmas remembrances, so many reminders of past follies, proved most irksomely oppressive.

At the *enormous sacrifice*—so at least he completely proved to his own satisfaction, when balancing the debtor and creditor accounts between imperative necessity and heart—Love was sold off for the benefit of others, and a new stock of more serviceable, sterling utility, substituted in its place. His wavering mind once made up, he never again hesitated or looked back, until, by dint of steady perseverance, he had satisfactorily gained his point!

"No ending to pleasant surprises this month!" exclaimed Ermentrude, her cheeks glowing with delight, as she read over Sybil's shoulder a portion of a letter she was holding up for her in-

Digitized by Google

spection. "John coming next Monday! And now, only think of it, Grace! Mr. Rutherford has written to say, he has actually determined to spend Christmas-week with us!"

But Grace, pouting her wilful lip, only made some inaudible reply, ate her breakfast in solemn silence until Sybil had left the room, when, with an alarming severity of aspect, she positively asserted it to be her decided opinion, that "there was no consistency extant in human nature. As long as she could remember anything, Mr. Rutherford had refused coming to Grantham; what mysterious cause could have been sufficiently potent to induce him to change his mind now, of all years in life, when he was least required to do so?"

"No explanation is vouchsafed—he simply writes he shall be here next Wednesday. What matters the cause, provided he will be with us?" answered Ermentrude, gaily.

"Not much, certainly. The *contretemps* is quite sufficiently vexatious to endure philosophically, without having yards of prosaic explanations attached, to make it more intolerably wearisome."

"*Contretemps?*"

"Even so. Adieu, now, to all idea of my visit to Holford. I must, perforce, stay at home to amuse our agreeable guest. My special aversion is an old-young man."

"How can you go so absurdly out of your way to make imaginary miseries! You know quite well, Mr. Rutherford is the very last per-

Digitized by Google

son to wish any one ever to sacrifice their wishes for his benefit; and there never existed a more self-dependent person for amusement than he!" exclaimed Uda, indignantly.

"I am fully aware that, in your eyes, he is considered perfection. So, doubtless, he is, in his own remarkable way. '*Tanto buon che val niente,*' in my estimation! Don't look so shocked, my dear, at my proverb. You have not participated in so many agreeable lectures as I have done, to endear him to recollection. Now, for my best acts to be misconstrued, my lightest words contorted and hardly judged! Penance at Christmas is against all established rule, and highly unpalateable; yet, if I really may go to the Manor, little I care: we shall not, in that case, come much in one another's way."

"John will be terribly disappointed at your absence."

"Will he?"

The tone of the question was so strangely complex, it made Uda turn to look at the speaker.

"He will survive it this time," continued Grace, nonchalantly. "What is good for one is bad for another in this up-and-down world," she said, turning abruptly away from her cousin, and walking to the window.

"You are sententious this morning."

"The sight of Mr. Rutherford's handwriting has imbued me with the spirit of conciseness. He is the greatest retailer of wise

Digitized by Google

maxims and trite remarks I know anywhere," retorted Grace, drumming a tune on the pane before her.

"What perverted ideas you have of people! To me, he is such a strikingly agreeable person—always cheerful, never prosy."

"Cheerful!—Yes, after the fashion of the German Baron, who was found by his friends occupied in the delectable employment of jumping over chairs and tables to learn liveliness! Your paragon's mirth is one spasmodic effort!"

"You are incorrigible, to-day; I shall leave you to chew the cud of bitter fancies, and to repent at leisure."

"The conversation proving unpalateable? I do believe you worship that man, and if you could be guilty of so unweighed an act, so young-lady a proceeding, as falling in love, that he would be the object. Nay, all the cross looks at me Miss Uda, will not shake my conviction. I am about to rid you of my presence; let me not part with so unpleasing a last remembrance of your beloved countenance impressed upon the tablets of my heart," she drawled out, with a ludicrous affectation of sentiment.

"Nor I, with such serious doubts of your sanity on my mind," remarked Uda, drily.

"Bravo, Uda! That retort courteous is very precious to me," answered Grace, rubbing her hands with mischievous enjoyment. "By the by, do not wait luncheon for me; I am going to the Manor."

"What! again to-day?"

Digitized by Google

"Ay! to-day, and to-morrow, and possibly the next day. I feel myself bound to keep that worthy old woman from making a laughing-stock of herself at her ball. I owe it to the cause of friendship and the credit of my paternal halls. Luckily, the house being my own, I can stop a good deal of the meretricious taste of the present possessor being expended thereon. Uda, my dear, you should not stand so near the fire. If you do, you will assuredly '*eat* your backbone, which is very *unolesome!*' as Mrs. Leigh observed, the other day, to her nephew. That was her last celebrated remark. I forgot to tell it you. Richard remarked, in reply, 'He had no doubt such cannibalism extraordinary *might* prove deleterious!' How recklessly she scattered poor letter H around that evening! it took the dear Bat several hours to pick them up and put them in their places. Now, leaving you, of course with regret, to the quiet joys of the fireside, I brave the frosty air, and hasten to the cultivation of taste and the beautiful in Mrs. Leigh!"

And, having exhausted all her present store of gay nonsense, Grace flew off to equip herself in walking attire.

Taking up Basil's letter, Uda went into the drawing-room. Having re-read it more than once, she became lost in a train of reflections.

"I trust the subject of such intense brown study is pleasant, my dear," said Miss Rutherford's voice, suddenly at her elbow.

Digitized by Google

Uda looked up, with the shy, frightened gaze of a startled deer.

"Still pondering over Basil's letter! I was wondering what had become of it. What possible food for such deep meditation can you find therein? The receipt of that letter, which made you and I so happy to-day, has nevertheless, as is often the case with joy, brought some little confusion and perplexity in its result," said Sybil, taking it from her.

"Why should it do so?"

"Apply to a wiser head than mine for solution to your question, Uda," answered Miss Rutherford, busily arranging her work-frame. "Why do human interests so frequently clash here below? Why are jarring elements so perpetually at work for mischief? The stubborn wilfulness of the course of things in general so often recalls those true lines of Matthew Arnold's to my mind—

> 'The hour whose happy unalloyed moments
> I would eternalise,
> Ten thousand mourners, well pleased, see end.'

So it ever is, day after day, with routine sameness. What is unalloyed delight at this moment to you and I, will, I fear, sadly interfere with the plan and enjoyment of another."

"You are tryingly enigmatical; I am no Œdipus, Aunt Sybil."

"Another, moreover, to whom I would so gladly give any little pleasure that lay in my power, ever so slightly to annihilate the many



Digitized by Google

'bleak, stern hours' that are her permanent portion," continued Sybil, thoughtfully, as she threaded her needle. "After all, it is only a vexatious crossing of plans, Uda."

"Some difficulty, which perhaps our united sagacity will easily smooth away."

"Not so easily, I fear, as Grace's ruffled brow. Did you note the unpopular reception my news met from her? How strangely she and Basil miss appreciating one another! That is clash number one easily removed, Uda. The other is . . ." Regularly, slowly, Miss Rutherford's needle several times pierced the canvas—"The other, Uda," she resumed, after a pause, "is, that your Aunt Ermentrude has invited herself to spend Christmas-week with us."

"What a mountain out of a mole-hill!" laughed Uda, undutifully.

"Surely it is clash enough? What singular sympathetic influence can have induced those two people to propose a visit here at the same time?"

"What more natural? No one overmuch fancies solitude at merry, sociable Christmas-tide."

"Why, Uda!" exclaimed Miss Rutherford, with a gesture of reproachful astonishment, "do you mean to say, that here you have been living like one of ourselves for so many, many years, and that, quick-sighted as you are, you have never learnt Basil's history?"

She shook her head—a sad look of distress for an instant overspread her face, and then vanished away.

In a few words Sybil briefly sketched the

Digitized by Google

tale of his early love and woe. "It blighted his life, Uda," said Miss Rutherford, in conclusion; "it changed him into what he now is; and I do not, in my own heart, believe that to this day he has forgotten her. It is the fashion to prate on the inconstancy of men; no doubt, many of them try us sadly, and are mere triflers with the strongest and holiest feelings: but where an earnest-minded man honestly and strongly loves, it is with a depth and entireness far outpassing the love of woman."

Her listener made no reply; there was a stony, fixed look in her eyes as Sybil looked up, marvelling at her silence, which perplexed and terrified Miss Rutherford.

"How could she — how dared she act so cruelly?" Uda, at length, gasped out, clenching her little hands together; "how hard must have been her nature to abuse the confidence of so great, so good a heart!"

"It was for your poor mother's sake she erred," answered Sybil, in a low voice; "therefore speak gently of her act, Uda. We all judged her over-harshly at the time, thinking her conduct heartless, her motives base, never for an instant doubting but that she had thrown Basil over for the sake of securing mere wealth and position. We wronged her bitterly. When she and I met again, it was by the deathbed of your poor father, dear; then, Uda, she revealed to me, how the ill-fated sacrifice had been made in the vain hope of rescuing your mother from penury and want."

Digitized by Google

"Oh that, even indirectly, we should have been the cause of so much suffering to him!"

"It is a common failing to lack faith implicitly to trust our dear ones to the fatherly care of Providence. We are all more or less wilfully apt to forget His justice, His sacred promises to carry and watch over what He has Himself created. It is hard to wait, so pleasant to aid, at any cost, those we love; and in the presence of deep feeling, very difficult to master will, duly to consider, weigh, and ponder, instead of acting."

"And for my mother's sake — my poor, suffering mother! — the temptation to alleviate her sorrows at any cost must have been so great, no wonder Aunt Ermentrude gave up her all in such a cause. Yet how can Mr. Rutherford feel kindly as he does towards us, knowing the suffering we were the unconscious causes of bringing on him?"

"It is the higher part to trust and realise to the utmost the love that never faileth, but as it was yesterday, so it is still to-day, unchangeable, everlasting; to do evil that good may come is a faulty course to pursue, depriving any act, however self-denying, of praiseworthiness and magnanimity. When we *can* aid others fairly and honestly, in all personal forgetfulness and cost, let us do so — no act so acceptable, no task so resembling that of the angels; but God does not always bestow the privilege of needing our weak assistance. When He requires it, He opens the path so clearly wherein we may walk, a willing

Digitized by Google

heart cannot overlook it; where such is not perceptible, depend upon it our true strength, our plain duty, indeed, is to sit trustfully still. Poor Ermentrude thought otherwise; sacrificed her own happiness, and that of the man who loved her dearer than life, without benefiting your mother in the smallest degree."

"To know for whose sake the error was committed must of course sanctify it to me; I never can forget who was the latent cause," said Uda, warmly.

"It was a desperate step to take. A loveless marriage is, at best, a reckless lottery wherein to speculate; in Ermentrude's case, sheer madness. She and Mr. Sherburne so totally unsuited, how was it likely they could agree? I always tremble lest Grace should choose her lot with equal rashness; she has all the impulsive failings of her family so strongly developed in her nature, and marriage seems such a constant consideration with her. It is a bad thing, Uda, when marrying and giving in marriage forms the *summum bonum* of all end and aim in woman's thoughts."

"Yet so natural, surely, for a woman to long to possess a home, to be ambitious to have a loving heart she can call all her own: it is pardonable if she occasionally dwells a little too much on the prospect of securing such blessings," answered Uda, thoughtfully.

"Natural in moderation, yes—but not to make it the one thing needful. Where it can be secured, no doubt it must considerably lighten

Digitized by Google

the burthen of life to share its weight and responsibilities with another; besides, it is only human to yearn for human love, natural to a woman to lean on some one else, rather than brave a solitary pilgrimage through a hard, trying world. Speaking from personal experience, I own, Uda, it requires no small amount of strong-heartedness to be resigned at first to the chill idea that it is an appointed lot to stand alone for ever through this life; but as hope gradually drifts from us, we learn to meet the inevitable with calm patience at last; after a while to feel it better so; nay, to hug freedom cheerfully. Indeed, when one sees how many joyless marriages there are, one can but wonder people are so eager to secure, where no love exists, merely a husband for whose name to change their own, settlements, and matronly dignity."

"I have sometimes fancied I should prefer my life to go by as yours, Aunt Sybil; it is a happy, useful career."

"Though preaching shockingly anti-matrimonial doctrines at this moment, that I hope will never be. I would far rather see you with a good, kind husband of your own, and a happy home, of which I know you would make the sunlight. I *am* a happy old woman; I thank God for it; but all old maids are not; some are querulous and discontented with their lot, because they will struggle against it and choose to look upon themselves in the dismal light of unprotected females. I loved once, Uda, and

Digitized by Google

loved for ever. It was God's will to separate us on earth; I live looking for a reunion in heaven. I was given to idol-worship in my youth, and the temptation was, fortunately, removed from my power. I am glad it was so; it is a fearful thing to instal the creature in the place of the Creator . . . How widely we have diverged from the starting-point of our conversation!" she said, with nervous abruptness. "It so happened, Basil and Ermentrude never met again until circumstances threw us all together at Hammerton. It was most trying to see them then, I assure you; cold as ice, and studiously avoiding one another; there was evidently no attempt at a reconciliation—that was a grievous mistake; and I daring not to move a finger in the matter. Only judge from this how awkwardly I am situated on the receipt of their respective letters this morning."

"I have but a confused remembrance of the scene; yet, what you have now been saying serving as explanation, I believe you are mistaken, and that some sort of explanation did take place at Hammerton," stammered Uda. "I have a perplexed recollection of Mr. Rutherford going up to Aunt Ermentrude, as she stood by the fire—it was the morning she left us—and I happened to be the only person in the room with them: they shook hands, and she was crying. I was such a child at the time, I can recall nothing further."

"It looks like it, certainly: how I should rejoice if it were so! Still, this in noways helps

Digitized by Google

me out of my difficulty; it goes to my heart to put either off. Yet, it would be very wrong to run the risk of inflicting pain by bringing them here together unknowingly."

"Does he care for her now?"

"How can I possibly tell, child?" answered Sybil, impatiently. "It is hard at any time to read the secrets of a man's heart. Not as a lover, certainly—Basil is too right-principled for that; but no one dares say, where they have once loved, what degree of pent-up, smothered feeling may remain dormant for the object of their attachment; and what mockery it is to pray the words, 'Lead us not into temptation,' if wilfully we persist in self-seeking it! The only thing to be done is, to write the truth to both of them."

Accordingly, by that day's post, the letters were written and despatched, penned with great pains and discretion. To the astonishment of prudent Sybil, taking no heed of the paragraph announcing Mr. Rutherford's advent, in her reply Ermentrude simply offered thanks for the willing acceptance of her as a guest; merely adding she would be at Grantham on the evening of the 24th.

Basil never even answered his sister's epistle, but came on the originally appointed day. In due time John Vaughan also arrived; and so once more the long-scattered friends were all assembled under the same roof.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XX.

"Dear Sybil, it was so very good of you to let me come here!" exclaimed Mrs. Sherburne, seizing both her friend's hands in her own the moment the door closed behind them, and they were alone together in her room—"so excessively good of you, and equally unreasonable of me wishing to inflict my dismal self at your happy fire-side this joyful season of the year."

"Nay, Ermentrude, we are only too rejoiced in possessing sufficient inducement to win you from your hermit solitude."

"I have pined and yearned so very strangely for society of late—I mean congenial, loving society—my courage failed me to condemn my sad heart any longer to its own suffering sympathy. Do you know what I mean by that? But no, I dare say *you* never pitied your own heart," she said, mournfully, relapsing into her old look of dreary brokenheartedness.

"Oh, yes, I have, often, in early youth; but not, I am thankful to say, for many past years: it is such a chill, crushing feeling."

"Is it not? I have pitied my heart, and hushed it, and watched over it, until it would

Digitized by Google

be quieted no longer; so I come here to seek for foreign aid, to administer to it a temporary opiate. It is such a wakeful, troublesome child, it seems as if nothing could ever lull it to healthy rest: it has been so many years cutting its wisdom teeth."

"You live too much by yourself for happiness, Ermentrude."

"And *for* myself, you would say," she answered, quickly. "Have you any idea how the days of my life go by? My days, Sybil, are spent with ignorance, poverty, and sorrow; in mortifying my selfish feelings to intensity. I can stand the day; I come back happy from my parish labours—meekened, comforted by my work, grateful for blessings and mercies; but then those evenings, they undo all—oh, those evenings!" she said, with a shudder.

"I can well credit that: evening is so completely the time when humanity can least bear to realise solitude of heart."

"That is true: we can endure it in the busy day, we have duties to fulfil, and the companionship of fellow-labourers who all have some claim upon our time and attention, which tend to keep our individual griefs and trials in subjection. We can bear it in the tranquil night, for the darkness seems to bring us only nearer to God, and we feel the angels are watching over us then; but evening seems the link between body and soul, earth and heaven: the last step on the verge of the one, the first on the threshold of the other. Then it is that our sorrow, crushed down

Digitized by Google

in the day, regains its supremacy; then it is we need the support of a steadfast entirely-trusted heart to be near us, the friendly, unchanging love, be it of friend or lover."

"The faint reflection given us below of the abiding communion of saints in heaven," murmured Sybil, reverentially.

"Instead of which, living a life in which there is no present — condemned to the sole society of ghosts of the past, the worst of all company — the bickering of the fire, with the occasional addition of the howling of the wind, or the rain beating against the window, the only sounds falling on my ears — not a word, not a cheerful home-smile to exchange with any one; — such is *my* unchanging portion. You know, too, Sybil, how sensitive I am by nature — how things which, to others, are light trifles, to me exaggerate themselves into matters of painful moment. I sit and sit on, trying to occupy myself; but with eyes wandering over the fire, rather than on book or work. Without being aware of it, I frequently find I have wasted an hour or more in making out quaint likenesses, and in arranging grotesque groups, from my strange discoveries in the combination of flame and coal, or watching the falling ashes, until it nearly disorders my brain. It is no wonder to me now how solitary confinement has driven men mad. I felt, at last, a break was necessary, if I wished to keep my own powers of reason."

"Have you heard any tidings of Mr. Sherburne lately?"

Digitized by Google

"His steward heard last week," she said, bitterly. "I saw the letter. There was no mention of coming home in it. He was still in Paris. He rarely writes to me."

"I trust, now you have once broken through your determination, and come to us, we shall often see you. We will do our best to cheer you up. What a nice party we shall be!"

"Your letter made me laugh, Syb: own you were half-terrified at having me. Your wise, cautious paragraph, in the midst of the kind assurances of anticipated pleasure, was not thrown away. You need have no fears; no tortoise or oyster is more deficient of impulse and feeling than I have become."

"The tone of our recent conversation offering us warranty for it?" asked Sybil, archly.

"It is so, in sober truth. Pity for myself prevails so largely, it leaves no room for other feelings. I think of Ralph a good deal," she said, abruptly. After a pause,—"I know not why, but lately thoughts of him haunt me. I believe, if he would only come home to me, I should end in really loving him."

* * * * *

It was, indeed, a happy party assembled under Sybil's roof on Christmas-day.

To the astonishment of their hostess, who to the last pertinaciously retained her misgivings, Basil and Mrs. Sherburne did not prove unmingling portions.

They met easily on the indifferent footing of

Digitized by Google

ordinary acquaintances, and neither was in the other's way, nor anybody's else. This being the case, her brother's presence added greatly to Sybil's satisfaction. It was the first Christmas they had spent together since his return to England, for Basil had never before been persuaded to revisit the Holford neighbourhood; whilst Sybil considered it a positive duty for Grace always to be amongst her tenantry and poor people at that season of good-will and gladness.

They all sat round the fire on Christmas-night, talking pleasantly and freely together—a far more agreeable way of keeping festival, to my fancy, than the many dividing, spasmodic attempts at amusement some kindly-intentioned people think it requisite to employ in order to ensure a merry evening.

Grace and John were the liveliest of the company. She, looking her best—radiant with smiles—in highest spirits—her light, arrowy wit, calling forth many a gay laugh from the rest—and John's more solid merit effectively retaliating in ponderous hits.

John was so very nice: he was not exactly handsome, he was not exactly brilliant, but he was so buoyant-looking—so intrinsically worthy—such a thorough gentleman—there was something so genial in all his ways, it made him an universal favourite everywhere.

Uda, seated between her guardian and John, was enjoying herself in her own quiet, observant way—more amused, perhaps, than amusing—not quite her natural self either.

Digitized by Google

There was a degree of vague constrainedness in her ways very foreign to her home nature; and more than once she appeared to have inherited her aunt's propensity for watching the fire — a proceeding of which I never witnessed any person guilty, under the influence of unalloyed happiness. There is generally some undercurrent of care or sorrow in the mind when eyes perpetually rivet themselves on a burning hearth.

The elder trio, if not quite as light-hearted as their younger companions, partaking soberly in the gaiety around them, gladdening their spirits in the reflection of youthful enjoyment.

It was an evening they one and all evermore remembered — an evening on which nothing remarkable occurred to chronicle; nothing of moment was said, or done — simply a quiet, pleasant evening, without one drawback, one serpent's trail over it, to mar its quiet enjoyment. Such resting-hours are rare; but who, amongst the turmoils and cares of life, cannot recall some similar hours, dwelling upon them with thankfulness of heart, blessing the Giver that they have held them as their own, if for ever so brief a period? for some such quiet days are accorded to every lot; their remembrance often to dwell in memory when busier scenes, more pleasurable excitements, are forgotten.

* * * * *

"Sybil," said Mrs. Sherburne, stopping in the passage, as if on sudden impulse, when, after wishing the rest of the party "good night," her

Digitized by Google

friend was accompanying her to her room — "did it ever strike you that little Uda has completely taken captive your brother's heart?"

"Uda? No! Why, he is old enough to be her father!"

"'Love takes no heed of boundaries,' we are told, Sybil, and I never found age an impediment in the way. Disparity of years is no lawful hindrance to be found in the 'man-may-not-marry-his-grandmother' catalogue! Old or young, trust me, my penetration is not at fault."

"I wish you never had suggested so ridiculous an idea, for, though I place no credit in it, I know I shall never be quit of it from my thoughts again — so utterly preposterous!" observed Sybil, with vexation, as she shut the door.

"Just as well you should grow accustomed to it," answered Mrs. Sherburne, composedly; "for, sooner or later, you will have to meet it. I could not quite make up my mind if Mr. Rutherford *admitted* the feeling, but am convinced he is beginning in downright earnest to care for Uda."

Sybil sank into a chair, open-mouthed with astonishment.

"It requires no very witch-like power to interpret Mr. Rutherford's absorption in her every act and word," pursued Mrs. Sherburne, quietly unpinning her head-dress. "After all, what is there so terrible in the probability? She is a steady, grave little thing, who will make him very happy, and atone, by a glad ending, for a life which I know, alas! has during its best years

Digitized by Google

been made lonely and suffering. You should rejoice, as I do, at the prospect, not lament. Why, Sybil, how scared you look!—you will cause me to regret mentioning the subject. It seemed to me so self-evident, I took it for granted you must be aware of it. Better go to bed and sleep on it; things become wonderfully more acceptable when they have been dreamt upon in the long watches of the night. Do not speak to the child about it, that is all I would impress on you," said Mrs. Sherburne, shaking hands with her.

"Not I! bad enough to have been let into the knowledge myself, without allowing the mischief to spread further," replied Sybil, disconsolately.

"Poor Sybil!" mused Mrs. Sherburne, half aloud, when she had left her; "I had no wish to give her pain. What would she say, I wonder, if I added my firm conviction that the child's happiness is likewise centred upon him? What strange destinies come together in this extraordinary world! How wondrously time reconciles us to all things! To think that I, who once loved him so dearly, made him so miserable for my love, can now be rejoicing at the prospect of his winning the love of another, when at one time of our lives we seemed absolutely necessary for the securement of each other's happiness. The silence of a life like mine is hard, very hard to be borne. O God, keep all those I love from such anguish; shield them from that bitterest of trials, I heartily beseech of Thee!" she exclaimed with fervour.

Digitized by Google

"Basil Rutherford my nephew! what a mournfully ludicrous idea!" she said, with a faint smile, as she rang for Martin.

On entering her room that night, leaning back in her favourite chair, Uda Kirkland resumed her fire-worshipping, in the course of which, communing with her heart, and minute investigation of its devious ways, her truthful nature made a discovery that kept her wakeful for many a long hour of a tedious weary night, succeeding "such a very pleasant evening!"

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXI.

When the evening of Mrs. Leigh's long-talked-of ball arrived, Sybil was confined to her room with influenza. It was quite impossible for her to think of going; much to her disappointment, she was obliged to delegate her young charges to the chaperonage of her brother.

"If you can possibly spare me the value of one minute's attention, Grace, I shall be grateful; I have something I want to ask you," said Uda to her cousin, chance having thrown them next one another at supper. It was, by the by, the first time Grace had been near Uda during the evening.

"I am all attention," was Miss Holford's laconic reply, her eyes as she spoke very *in*attentively wandering over the crowd of heads in the distance.

"My question is nothing very important; I am only ambitious of knowing the name of yonder old gentleman."

"I have read the *Midsummer's Night's Dream*, which is well for my powers of astonishment, if you mean the possessor of that wizen old face

Digitized by Google

and luxuriant crop of vividly brown hair standing in the doorway," answered Grace, drily.

"Just so. How much better he would look with his own grey hairs!"

"Not he! that brown wig has its advantages; without it no one would remark him. I have not an idea who he is."

"I thought, as you were both staying in the same house, you would be certain to tell me," said Uda, in a tone of evident disappointment.

"Is he staying here? By the by I think, now you mention it, I do remember noticing him at dinner. He must have come late, for I neither heard nor saw anything of him beforehand. Meeting him here, you may take his name for granted to be Smith; if not, Jones, or Tomkins. Do you wish for an introduction? (there's no accounting for taste); I make no doubt I could easily manage one."

"He has spared you the trouble, by already introducing himself, asking such strange questions, seemingly knowing all concerning me and my family."

"By every means, then, cultivate the sudden attraction; he is certain to be as rich as Crœsus —all Mrs. Leigh's friends are so. Ah, here is her nephew coming towards us! Your curiosity respecting the unknown can now be speedily satisfied," said Grace, her countenance brightening as Richard slowly sauntered up, his glass in his eye, in a careless preoccupied manner, scrutinising the different tables and their occupants as he passed by them.

Digitized by Google

"The crowd is so dense I quite lost sight of you, and was positively beginning to despair of ever approaching you again to-night," he drawled out in implied apology to Grace, perfectly conscious he was at the moment in that young lady's blackest book, he having been guilty of taking her into supper, then, on some trivial pretence or other, leaving her to her own devices.

"I sincerely trust you have received no material injury in your great exertions to return to me," she answered, sarcastically. "I assure you I have been very well taken care of: I found a host of kind friends near, who took every charge of me; and as I had the pleasure of seeing you just now in the distance, intent on performing the same good offices for another, I was but too glad to feel no impediment in the way of your philanthropic exertions," she ended, pointedly.

"I stopped to get my cousin some tea, certainly; as usual, she was entirely neglected," he answered, with involuntary bitterness of tone. "But let me make my peace for my unwarrantable desertion," he resumed the next moment, playfully. "What can I get you? Nothing? I wish you would have a slice of melon."

"At supper? How very out of character!"

"It would be such charity to cut it. I have seen that melon figuring in the centre of the table for at least six consecutive dinner-parties, and have now bowed to it so often, it really seems quite necessary that we should shake hands as old acquaintances. Do be persuaded to have some, Miss Holford."

Digitized by Google

Grace laughed, but not gleefully; for, whilst talking nonsense to her, he was looking searchingly up the room, as she had done before him.

"Miss Kirkland has hopelessly lost her heart to an old gentleman in a brown wig. Do you happen to know his name?" she asked, in a sharp, abrupt way, effectually recalling his attention. "Any particulars will be acceptable, for it is a desperate case. He was deep in the contents of a barrel of oysters the last time I noticed him!"

"Grace, how wildly you rattle on!"

Richard examined the group Grace designated through his glass. "I can give you every information you may require in that quarter," he finally answered, laughing. "I have the honour of standing in the relation of step-son to that old gentleman. He is a namesake of Miss Kirkland's, though I am not aware they are in any way related. He arrived unexpectedly this evening, much to Mrs. Leigh's annoyance—he being very hard to please, very fidgetty, and very requiring."

"I did not know before that you possessed a step-father, Mr. Leigh!"

"Very possibly. Late in life my mother married a second time. Mr. Kirkland was wealthy, she very poor. I imagine there was not much other attraction—it was the wisest thing she could do."

"I pronounced him rich directly Uda pointed him out to me."

Digitized by Google

"Of course you did; any one can see that directly."

"He has such a provoking look of a pocket full of bank-notes strongly impressed on his countenance!"

"An aggravating expression for the contemplation of a poor man," said Richard, meditatively. "It peeps out in the very sit of that knowing brown wig. But, it strikes me I hear certain premonitory scrapings of fiddles; consequently dancing again beginning. This valse, I think, is promised to me?" he said, bending in his old devoted manner over Miss Holford.

"It is. Therefore, 'Awa' *wigs*, awa'!'" cried Grace, merrily. "We cannot afford to waste Laurent's music for their discussion!"

"Shall I take you back to the ball-room, Uda?" inquired Basil, quietly slipping into the place vacated by Grace. "I have been a very inattentive cavalier," he went on, as he led her thither; "but that tedious man Hutchinson would detain me talking wearisome politics, I could not shake him off anyway."

"I saw it was not your fault," said Uda, gently.

"Are you not going to dance? What should I do? I am sadly ignorant of the duties of a *chaperon*. I cannot think what people are about they do not ask you!" exclaimed Basil, quite indignantly.

"Asking other people, I suppose! I have been dancing everything until now, and shall be glad to sit quiet a little bit—indeed I prefer it," she said, hurriedly.

Digitized by Google

"Very well, I am not going to quarrel with your wish. Years ago I should have sacrificed myself for your benefit, and refused to let you sit out this dance; now I have lived long enough to seize pleasures when they come to me, and not anticipate, if I neglect them when offered, that I shall ever regain the chance in the future. Experience makes one horridly selfish, Uda. So, since I cannot offer my services as a partner, I am content to monopolise your society for awhile. What a change a few years make in a neighbourhood!" he went on, with a sigh. "I have not been to a ball in these parts for quite twenty years, and now scarcely recognise a single face present. It is a dreary trial to return thus to an old haunt; it makes past things go by before the mind's eye in rapid succession, and that saddens. I hope *you* are enjoying your ball, Uda?"

"Very fairly. I have appreciated some better. How well Grace is looking to-night!" she said, as her cousin flew by them in the valse. "She and Mr. Leigh are by far the handsomest couple in the room."

"I hate the fellow, he is such an insufferable coxcomb; and Grace is over-dressed. What could induce a child, hardly out of the nursery, to trick herself out in all those diamonds, like an old Vanity-Fair Dowager?"

"She is proud of her family jewels. They suit her; else they *are* rather opposed, I admit, to her youth, and the simplicity I prefer in a toilette."

Digitized by Google

"What has simplicity to do with Grace Holford? I hate ornaments, especially on young people. If I had my way, no woman should ever wear any—a remnant of the barbarous ages! What can they want to array themselves in glittering stones and bits of metals, to pass over their growing savage propensity for beads and bugles!"

"I advise you not openly to proclaim such Gothic opinions."

"Lest I should be regarded in the light of a hopeless, unreclaimed savage myself, you imagine?"

"Of course you would, and deservedly. Mr. Rutherford, there is a gentleman here to-night who has been talking in a strange way to me on family matters. His name, I find, is Kirkland; can you tell me if he is in any way connected with us?"

"Do you voluntarily select a ball-room as fittest place to hear information which, probably, may more than startle you?"

"The time and place are as good as any other, unless *you* think it better deferred." she added, with quickness.

"Not with you. And preambles, in my opinion, only tending to make people anticipatively nervous, I tell you at once, that man is your great-uncle, Uda; the same who brought up your father, and cast him off because he would marry Mr. Holford's daughter—for the spite was solely against your grandfather. With passing years the old man's heart has relented;

Digitized by Google

chance revealed to him you were residing in this neighbourhood; longing to see you, he came here unexpectedly to-night for that purpose, and, to his dismay, found this ball going on. It had been his original intention to keep his name and purpose secret from you; but fearful lest you should, under the circumstances, receive sudden notice who he was, and refuse to meet him, he introduced himself. You made a very pleasing impression, I can assure you. He has had quite a long talk about you with me already."

"The improbability of the story bewilders me! It is hard to believe that odd, ill-mannered man, in that horrid wig, could be so nearly related to my dear father."

"I thought you had a soul above external prejudices and superficial judgments, Uda."

"Perhaps something rancours in my heart injurious to impartiality, when the remembrance surges up of how much misery Mr. Kirkland brought to those dear to me, who so little deserved it at his hands," she said, ingenuously.

"He is truly repentant for the past. When, by his marriage, your father so deeply incurred his uncle's displeasure, as you may perhaps have heard, he first left all his money away to charities. Circumstances afterwards threw him into the society of Richard Leigh's mother, a handsome, scheming, worldly woman—I met her in India, some years ago—she made up to him, and he married her. Richard is reputed his heir. He proposed a mad plan to me—

Digitized by Google

something utterly preposterous—which I shall not tell you now, you are looking so very severe and indignant. Uda, indeed you must be forgiving. No one can do more than repent; and why should we, with our own burden of innumerable sins crying out for forgiveness, shut our hearts against pardoning our brother's trespass, when God is willing to receive our contrition, and so abundantly pardon?"

"I *will* try," she said, tearfully.

"I know you will. Never harden your heart against reconciliation. I did so once, Uda, and if you had ever done likewise, you would know how dreadful a thing it is; how it indurates the whole soul. Now dismiss the subject from your thoughts; you will not be troubled with Mr. Kirkland's society any more to-night, for he is tired and gone to bed. There is a kind heart resting below that formidable brown wig, as you would have said had you heard the way he spoke of you—a sure means of winning my heart, as you know, Uda. How busy Mrs. Leigh is to-night!" he observed, suddenly checking himself; "exaggerating the attentions of a hostess until they become burdensome."

"Poor woman! she is so anxious to please all the world, to make every body about her happy, her kindheartedness causes one to overlook many a little deficiency and failing."

"Half the world would say it arose from fussiness and want of tact. I wonder if, with all its modern improvements, the world will ever

Digitized by Google

grow kindlier in its judgments? It should do so in these days of boasted brotherhood; since it is the many little weaknesses and failings of human nature which, after all, are not merely invaluable as food for lively satire, but serve to bind people closest together."

"Do you really think so?"

"Most undoubtedly! I firmly believe the reason large families are usually so attached to one another is, because their love strengthens with having to bear with mutual failings, and their sympathies and interest are kept alive by being so frequently called into practice. We are more exacting in the wider field of the world. Society wants Christianising."

"We certainly do care much more for people, when some little touch of Nature, accidentally called forth, betrays to us they are only human like ourselves, than whilst we only saw their society-faces, and believed them our ideal, stiff-necked superiors. I have often noticed that myself," said Uda, thoughtfully. "Yet abhorrence of sin is a naturally-implanted feeling in human nature."

"Sin, I grant you. I was merely speaking of infirmities. The very angels in heaven grew rebellious from presumption and self-complacency. I often fancy they fell from sheer need of a faulty earth whereon to expend their ministering sympathies, and sorrowful mortals to reclaim and comfort, whereby to keep alive tenderheartedness and pitying love—an unorthodox idea of my own, Uda—but I sometimes think,

Digitized by Google

after reading of Heaven, one of our greatest astonishments will be to find how much more it resembles this world, in many ways, than we generally anticipate — earth, without its cares and trials, its shortcomings and miseries — and undoubtedly, here below, there is nothing that teaches us humility as does charity in our judgment of others. But we have been led on into a very grave discussion for a ball-room. It is effectually ended now; for I see John Vaughan approaching, evidently on dancing thoughts intent. I resign you into better hands. How sadly I must have wearied you!" said Basil, abruptly rising and walking away from her.

"Will you dance, Uda?"

She excused herself on the plea of fatigue.

"Well, then, come and look at the flowers; it is pleasanter than sitting here," said John, eagerly.

She accepted his proffered arm; and they passed into the conservatory. Basil stood apart; his eyes intently fixed on them. His face was very pale, his lips tightly set together, as he watched their retreating figures.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was in the conservatory that Grace, some short time afterwards, found her cousin. Miss Holford entered quickly, looking discomposed and thoughtful. Vexation was the first expression of her countenance on seeing Uda.

"I have come here in hopes of a little peace," she said, hastily. "I have had a headache all evening, and have been whirling round and round until it now throbs to distraction," she grumbled on, discontentedly.

"I am very sorry. Can I do anything for you?—get you anything?" sympathised Uda, in the most melancholy of voices.

Grace moved about restlessly; pulled to pieces several flowers near her.

"Does your head ache, too, Uda?" she said, suddenly going up to her cousin.

"Not exactly."

"If not your head, does your heart ache?" she inquired, suspiciously. "You look the picture of misery. Mine does," she all at once exclaimed, quite fiercely.

"Are you unhappy, Grace?" asked Ermentrude, timidly drawing nearer to her.

Digitized by Google

"I never said so; I merely remarked, my heart ached. That is intermittent pain with me, Uda, not chronic. How dull we both seem to-night! does it not strike you so?"

They stood side by side, without exchanging a word. Grace drew off her glove, and, dipping her fingers in the fountain, began to drop the water on her face and brow. When she looked again at her companion, Ermentrude was wiping away tears from her eyes.

"Uda, you may say what you will to the contrary, but I am certain *you*, at all events, are unhappy," cried Grace, impulsively seizing Uda's hand. "Tell me what it is, that I may know how to compassionate you."

Uda returned the warm pressure of Grace's hand, but for the rest only shook her head.

"Once you never had a secret apart from me," cried Grace, flinging away her cousin's hand, and chafing visibly.

"Nor should I now; only, Grace, I scarcely know if I have any right to tell you what is distressing me—the secret seems properly to be another's more than mine: yet you shall know it, if you wish; only do not speak unkindly to me, dear, for I feel very sad," said Uda, touchingly.

Grace looked mollified.

"I am so unhappy about John," resumed Miss Kirkland: "he has made me make him miserable; yet it was the kinder part, too. He loves me very dearly, Grace; whilst I, Grace, have nothing but a sister's love to give him in

Digitized by Google

return," she stammered through struggling tears.

"Do you mean, he has been asking you to marry him?" bluntly asked her companion.

"Yes," murmured Uda, piteously.

"And you were goose enough to refuse him?"

"What else could I do? I had not the love to give him with which a woman should love her chosen husband; it tortured me to inflict on him pain; it tortures me worse to feel how, if ever so unintentionally, I *must* have given him some encouragement, or he never would have spoken to me as he did just now. We were such old friends, it was difficult to know that friendship had ended with love; I never divined how it was until he told me."

"Oh, the cross-purposes of the world!" impetuously broke in Grace. "And you refused him!—refused him for a shadow!" she repeated, wonderingly. "Uda, I would give all my possessions, all my pride, and birth, and name, for the love of one such honest heart as John Vaughan's!"

"You, Grace, whom every one worships—every one admires!" exclaimed Uda, in astonishment.

"Yes, there it is, *worships* and *admires!*—admires for a possibly pretty face, worships for house and lands!" Valuable adoration, certainly. I have not, at this moment, one heart on whom I could rest as faithfully my own, come what would, certain that no adventitious circum-

Digitized by Google

stances of mere fortune could alter it Not one—aye, I would, indeed, give all I own to purchase such love, which, freely offered, *you* wilfully cast away! Do you marvel, Uda, to hear me speak thus, when I always seemed to you such a flighty, worldly, careless being? So, I dare say, I am; but a good man, whom I could respect, and who cared for me, might mould me nearly into perfection. I love good things; I honour them in my heart. It suits me to mock and laugh back the folly lavished upon me. Oh! believe me Uda, there are none amongst women so little comprehended so falsely estimated—especially by their own sex—as those who charm, and talk, and are popular with all the world. *My* sort, in fact, Ermentrude; we are sweepingly judged, pronounced, 'heartless, shallow, careless, feelingless,—*Are* we? "I came here, Uda," she quickly resumed, "literally to escape a declaration of love from one who fascinates me against my will. In my sober moments I know he is untruest amongst all; yet, against my better judgment, what a hopeless net he is tightly winding around me! How sadly restless I am to-night! What bombastic nonsense I have been talking! This is no conversation; no spirit to nourish in a ball-room. Other people are entering: let us go away, Uda, or your depression will be generally noticed."

"I never, never thought," she said, lingering under pretence of drawing on her glove, "that John Vaughan was capable of loving for love's

Digitized by Google

sake only. John is a prudent sort of man, whose first consideration, *I* should have supposed, would have been money. Happy Uda, to have it in your power to call forth so true an attachment!

* * * * *

The ball was at an end—the rooms deserted—the last guest had departed—the family retired to their respective dormitories. It was pitch dark and foggy, and about four o'clock in the morning.

"Hollo! what's that? who's there?" all at once exclaimed old Mr. Kirkland's voice, throwing up the sash, and popping his nightcapped head out of the window. "Who's there? I am positive I heard a window open."

No reply; only a faint, scratching sound audible: then a glimmering speck of light perceptible a short distance from him. "Who's there? I say. By George, sir, if you won't speak, I'll shoot you to a dead certainty," cried the old man, with increasing fury.

"It was only me you heard, getting out of the window to smoke a pipe," replied Richard Leigh, with impatience. "For Heaven's sake, do not make such a confounded noise, or you will inevitably alarm the whole household!"

"Nice household, truly, where a man is kept awake, until long past midnight, by the discordant scrapings of fiddles and tootings of flutes! and then, when he is sinking into his first sleep, at the time when he ought to be getting up fresh and ready for the day's work,



Digitized by Google

to be woke up again, with a false alarm like this!" muttered the other, peevishly. "If you must indulge in that nasty habit, I should recommend, in future, that, like a rational being, you should go and smoke in the garden, or kitchen, instead of disturbing honest folks by getting out of the window like a housebreaker."

"Housebreakers having an unfortunate propensity for getting *in* at windows, the comparison is not quite happy," was Richard's cool rejoinder.

"When they are once in, I presume they must get out again? Worse for them if they cannot," was the testy answer. "Well, as you are there and I am here, just draw as near as you can. I have a few words to say to you. There's no time like the present—that's one of my precepts. I dare say you will not give me the chance again to-morrow."

"That is curiously probable," *sotto voce* muttered Richard; then aloud: "Shall you not catch cold, sir, standing there exposed to the night air?"

"I dare say, now, you have got a roaring fire in your room," replied Mr. Kirkland, a mischievous delight twinkling up his little grey eyes. "In these degenerate days young men take such praiseworthy good care of themselves. As you are so amiably solicitous about me, suppose I change my quarters thither: less chance of being overheard, too, than if we talked out of your window."

Digitized by Google

"The fire must be burning low, I fear, by this time," answered Richard, in alarm, discreetly averting his looks from the casement of his luxurious *sanctum*, over which a very comfortable looking flicker from within was dancing; "and the porch so far down, you would, probably, break your neck leaning out, before I could hear you .... (Once he got the trick of coming to my room, there would be no conclusion to this pleasure. Very odd, the apparent dislike the past generation possess to stay quietly in their beds! What a conscience the man must have to be so wakeful!")

So, grumbling aside, Richard cautiously stole back on tiptoe to his apartment, double-locked the door, and with incredible rapidity returned again unmissed, next instant.

He found Mr. Kirkland still busily talking away, wasting a vast amount of energy on an imaginary listener.

"I did not quite catch that last sentence," composedly remarked Richard, discovering that his tormentor was requiring an answer.

"You must have turned very deaf all of a sudden. I was saying, sir, that in my opinion you flirt a great deal too much with that pretty, penniless cousin of yours, that *Dam de company* of your aunt's—if that is the absurdity she chooses to call her; and that I distinctly request you to understand, if that nonsense continues you will effectually incur my displeasure."

"Do you mean Mary, sir? I assure you there is no cause for alarm in that quarter. I

Digitized by Google

like her very much, and she likes me—all cousinly affection. You may make your mind quite easy," said Richard, nonchalantly. "A woman should marry for position, a man for money, that is my code," he presently went on, busily occupied in refilling his pipe. "I am grown, by experience, prudent as you can wish me, and have no intention of throwing away my prospects for a mere love-dream."

"Glad to hear it. I have other views for you. What is your opinion of Miss Kirkland?"

"She seems a nice quiet little girl enough, I should say," answered Richard, critically.

"A good girl, too, I am certain, and quite sufficiently pretty. She has greatly pleased me this evening. A poor man like you, Richard Leigh, has no right even to *like* pauper cousins; liking may turn to love any day, and you cannot afford to marry poverty."

"I am fully aware of that arbitrary prohibition; it is strictly reserved for rich men only to have the privilege of choosing a wife according to fancy," observed Richard, with bitterness.

"Humph! is that remark meant to be personal, I wonder?" and the tassel of the white nightcap ominously nodded to and fro.

"Am I to have the pleasure, then, of shortly congratulating you, sir, on an alliance with this good and sufficiently pretty young lady?" asked Richard, nearly suffocated with suppressed laughter.

"Miss Kirkland is my great-niece, sir!" thundered the old man, waxing wroth—"a cir-

Digitized by Google

cumstance of which, I presumed, by this time you had been made aware. I disinherited her father because he would marry her mother. I am sorry for it now; and shall make what restitution I can to their daughter. I do not wish to be just, however, at your expense, little as you deserve consideration, make your mind easy on that score: you shall marry her. There 's a chance for you!"

"I am really obliged for your kind intentions, sir; but I have, unfortunately, a will of my own, and my choice is fixed in another direction."

"And who, pray, may be its object?" asked Mr. Kirkland, sneeringly.

"One against whom, I am sure, even you can bring no objection—as you must agree when I name Miss Holford."

"Excepting that I prefer for you, Uda Kirkland. What can you urge against her, excepting her outlandish name?"

"Nothing; but that she is too good for me."

"Parcel of nonsense!"

"And that I have no reason to flatter myself she ever wasted a thought on me. I shall be only too happy to claim her as a relation, but there it must end, sir. We are conversing seriously, and I will be candid with you. Were I a rich man, and could afford to give way to feeling, Mary Leigh should be my wife: as it is, I sacrifice my inclinations to expediency. I have gone too far with Miss Holford to retract without further explanation. In my place no

Digitized by Google

one could, with any honour, act otherwise than I purpose doing."

"You are a cold, calculating man, Richard. I do not believe you possess any heart whatsoever!"

"Considerably more, underneath all my coldness and calculation, than half the men who profess to own such a troublesome appendage. If Miss Holford condescends to marry me, I will do my best to make her happy."

"I am always plain-spoken, Richard, and distinctly tell you, if you do not agree to my propositions respecting my niece, not one farthing of my money shall ever be yours."

"I never expected it would, sir."

"Richard Leigh, you are an incorrigible fool!" vehemently exclaimed the now irate old man, with a great crash that made every pane rattle and shake, suddenly banging down the window.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXIII.

The day after a ball is almost proverbially voted a dull period of reaction. The guests at Holford Manor proved no exception to the opinion. Weary, and fit for nothing, in the course of the morning they straggled down to a late breakfast, and that meal discussed, proceeded to dawdle away the intervening time as best they could until the reviving sound of the luncheon-bell should give them the grateful relief of some definite employment. In marked contrast to the tired, idle assembly, old Mr. Kirkland was as brisk and lively as possible; up with the lark, he was in a state of mind of unusual satisfaction and hilarity. Mrs. Leigh was the sole sharer of his blitheness; to use a country phrase, "looking as fresh as a peony," and somewhat of the same rubicund complexion: but then Mrs. Leigh was ecstatic, with a vast overflow of happiness; her ball had been pronounced charming by every one, Mr. Kirkland was taking life easier than he had ever been known to take it before, Grace had been declared, without contradiction, the belle of the evening, Richard had shown her marked attention, and, better than all, in

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Leigh's opinion, the Dowager Countess of Whirlton—a great lady in her own limited circle; as Mrs. Leigh remarked, when recounting the interesting fact to Mary—"had in the most condescending manner paid Miss Holford the unusual compliment of requesting an introduction!" In a word, there had not been one single drawback in the entertainment.

I have been (I regret to say it) sadly remiss in introducing Mrs. Leigh to the notice of my readers. It is time she should be brought forward on the stage as her merits require.

In appearance, Mrs. Leigh was the express image of Britannia. Her rosy face was radiant with perpetual smiles, excepting when, for a little variety, she was lecturing Mary. Her yellow hair was dressed out in the stiffest arrangement of frizzed curls imaginable; her portly figure, taking into consideration its enormous size, wondrously preserved in capacious shapableness; she always arrayed herself in gorgeously-patterned brocades, of the stiffest procurable fabric, and startling caps, decorated with a surprising amount of gay ribbons. She had, moreover, a strong predilection for massive ornaments, and spent a good deal of her substance in their purchase, being invariably caparisoned in a considerable number of such gauds conspicuously disposed about her attire. In fact, all relating to Mrs. Leigh was on an extended scale, including her heart and temper—the former of which, if not judicious in judgment on every occasion, was exceedingly kind;

Digitized by Google

the latter easily irritated, but ready to forgive the very next moment. Life had gone smoothly with Mrs. Leigh, and she had few real ideas concerning want and sorrow. She could pity and feel *for* others, not sympathise and feel *with* them. The difference is wide in its distinction. She was charitable in almsgiving, but the greater charity bestowed on the poor and afflicted by those who lack silver and gold, the charity which binds them together, heart to heart, was sadly wanting. Her charity resembled that of the Princess of France, who, whilst deeply commiserating the famishing multitudes, inquired of her attendant, "Wherefore should people starve when there are so many buns in the bakers' shops?" So Mrs. Leigh; whenever Want petitioned for assistance, she would distribute tantamount to whole shops full of bread to the pauper recipients of her bounty; but she could not follow the lesson plainly taught us—the better part—of making the few loaves and fishes go far, because done with a kindly heart and loving spirit. As to grief in her passage through this "vale of tears," Mrs. Leigh had experienced but one instance, in the death of her "poor, dear, lamented Leigh," as she invariably spoke of him. It was whispered, for that calamity she had not long been inconsolable!

The day succeeding her ball Mrs. Leigh sat at the head of her table, dispensing "*'ashed* venison," as she called it, with a very bland, affable face, indeed. Uda and Basil were

Digitized by Google

amongst the guests. The Grantham party had overnight received an invitation to have luncheon at the Manor. Sybil's cold still prevented her leaving the house, and John had excused himself on the plea of an engagement, made the previous evening, to ride over to a neighbouring gentleman's house, for the purpose of improving his ideas of form and loveliness by feasting his eyes on the exquisite proportions of some prize pigs, and looking at some recently purchased agricultural implement, the like of which John had seen many a time before; but for the exhilarating spectacle of *re*-seeing, he seemed that day strangely desirous. Uda was equally anxious to stay at home, pleading Sybil's indisposition in excuse, and eloquently dwelling on her loneliness if they all again deserted her: but Basil would not hear of it; he had promised Mr. Kirkland she should go to Holford; it was her duty to do so, and encourage the friendly terms the old man was willing to establish between them. Sorely against her will, Uda had finally consented to accompany him. Having submitted to a variety of pretty speeches and shakes of the hand, as resignedly as she could manage, she was now sitting by her new-found relative, striving to look as little like a victim as possible.

Grace and Richard Leigh were in extraordinary spirits — the provocatives to their merriment often too absurdly far-fetched not to savour suspiciously of forced gaiety; Mary more than usually depressed and taciturn, sufficiently so to draw forth innumerable little witticisms

Digitized by Google

at her expense from the vivacious lips of Mrs. Leigh, until Richard came to the rescue, and with a very severe "Don't tease her—cannot you see she is dead tired?" uttered in the most autocratical of voices in the midst of a general pause, brought the tears to Mary's eyes, and effectually stopped Mrs. Leigh's facetiousness.

"What are all the world going to do with themselves this evening?" inquired Richard, breaking the silence that had ensued after his sudden championship of Mary's cause.

"A long walk would be the pleasantest thing," said Grace; "it freshens one up so after a ball."

So a walk it was arranged to be. The next subject of discussion—"Whither?" Oakley Dell was proposed, and Grace's selection eagerly adopted.

Mary declined going with them, but all the rest of the younger members of the party, with Basil as staid accompaniment, set out for Oakley Dell; Mr. Kirkland calling after the ladies from the hall-door, in direful lamentation that they were going too far for him to attend them, "Charming creatures!"

The day was fine and frosty, the sun bright, the air keen and bracing, the ground crisp and dry. Their road chiefly lay through the Holford woods. A tiny brook ran sparkling beside the pathway, pleasantly murmuring its merry little song of glad existence; the birds were busily hopping from twig to twig; otherwise all nature looked stirlessly calm, clearly cold.

"What are you pondering on so deeply,

Digitized by Google

Uda, as if lost in some abstruse calculation?" Basil asked, stopping for her as she was lagging behind the rest.

"You are right in your surmise of 'calculation.' I was trying to compute how many more weeks must elapse before we returned to Brereton," she said, looking up with a smile.

"Discontented Uda! what happier, easier life can you spend than you are doing here?"

"I do not seem to care for Grantham this year, and existence at Brereton is always more satisfactory. I prefer the place, the people, the lives we lead there, and the interest that sharing in your labours for their benefit affords me. One's inner life is more satisfactory at Brereton than here."

"You will be sorry when the time comes to leave us, then, Uda?"

"Is any important change about to take place at home to produce such a calamity, or are you tired of me, and thinking of sending me away?" she asked, laughing.

"Do you think it likely *I* should wish to lose you? and at my time of life, what self-bestowed change to disturb the even tenour of my way is probable to occur? I thought it was you who, maybe, meant to run away from us."

"I am the last to learn it," she said, colouring.

He looked at her with doubtful scrutiny, then absently remarked,—"Your uncle is very likely, under his present change of feeling, to want you to take care of him in his old age."

"Never!" she said, emphatically.

Digitized by Google

"Do not be so sure of that; make no rash vows, Uda: they are generally uttered only to be broken. It does not do enthusiastically to cast away self-interest at all times. Duty and right interests are often more nearly allied in this world than many think for. What a state that cottage is in!" he broke off abruptly, as they passed a miserable hovel.

"Wretched!" exclaimed Ermentrude. "How can landlords, possessing a conscience, allow cottages to fall into such unfit condition for human occupation? One of my chief sources of pleasure at Brereton is to witness the huts you inherited gradually changing into neat, substantial dwellings—it is such satisfactory work, so completely a labour of love, in which I am sure interest and duty are combined," she said, quoting his words, with her sunniest smile.

"Yet many call me a fool for my pains, upon which they look down with profound contempt. Cottages are not reckoned remunerative possessions, Uda; and solidly repairing and enlarging them, as I am doing, is considered a loss of capital, and, consequently, mistaken policy."

"I cannot realise how expenditure can be reckoned ultimate loss, which must so greatly tend to improve the general condition and morals of a people. In all permanent reforms, we must look beyond the actual return of the hour."

"That is my argument. I consider the man does more for country and posterity who leaves behind him a hardy, self-dependent, moral race of tenants, with a strong feeling of sterling

Digitized by Google

s given and received, to bind them heart
nd to their landlord, though the resources
for the work may temporarily pinch his
, and deprive him of the means of indulg-
the luxuries of a Dives, than he who
gives a small portion of his substance,
loss he never feels, to the Lazarus at his
nd bequeaths to his successor wealth or
grown mansion, and a helpless, ignorant,
ised race of struggling, canting serfs.
e present condition of cottages are im-
what avails for durable good effects all
aching and visiting in the world? Clever
ay discourse themselves hoarse, and good
wear themselves out attending to the
but till in daily, family life, the common
es and proprieties which come as matters
se with us are inculcated in cottage exist-
e can do little effectually to raise the tone
l or check the prevailing gross immorality
gricultural population. As long as whole
are indiscriminately herded into one
have small hopes of reforming the poorer
but landowners in general wilfully shut
yes to this; and one reason is, that few,
the kindest-hearted men, are brought face
with the actual working of the present
: they leave the poor to their wives and
ers and the parish priest; and until land-
tually take the poor into their own hands,
with their own eyes, and learning in their
by personal experience the condition and
of the working man, they and he will

Digitized by Google

continue on, as they now are, in their respective opinions, two separate classes of people, each misunderstanding the other, and pertinaciously believing their natures to be governed by distinct laws, instead of being all equally men and women, divided by the accidents of birth and fortune, but having like feelings and passions, and needing equal observance and respect."

"Who owns the property through which we are now passing?"

"A Mr. Clinton, a non-resident squire, quite a young man, and reckoned liberal and kind-hearted; but I do not suppose, when he occasionally comes down here, he ever thinks of entering a cottage, unless it be his old nurse's or the gamekeeper's. All is left to the agent, and behold the result—his hunters and dogs are fifty times better lodged than the living souls committed to his care."

"Who yet were of sufficient value for the Son of the King of Heaven to humble himself upon earth, and die to save them," murmured Ermentrude, sorrowfully.

"It is by no means an uncommon case: in thoughtlessness, and a strange dislike to grasping truth, if unpleasing and requiring self-sacrifice, originate nine-tenths of the evils of the present day, not in hardness of heart, or deliberate perversion of good gifts."

"Still, there is a faint hope of better times dawning for the poor."

"Yes; though spite of boasted wisdom and progression, the world has not got beyond its

Digitized by Google

horn-book—humanity, alas! is only learning the alphabet in the redressing of evils."

"But the probability of ultimate success in harmonising all these discordant elements is slowly dawning before our eyes," exclaimed Ermentrude, enthusiastically. "Each day discovers some new truth."

"The danger, to my thinking, now, is lest these priceless promises should end like those of many a precocious child in a wondrous aptitude for learning and speaking words; when it comes to man's estate, to end in an exhausted power of action, from having in the early days of its education attempted too much for its strength; certainly just now the promise is bright, our hopes very sanguine."

"The capacity for learning fine words by rote is wondrously great—that no one can deny," said Richard Leigh scoffingly, who, with Grace, had drawn near unperceived.

"I would rather live in the present than in all the so-called glorious ages of the past," Basil, slowly went on. "It is a grand century, in which the interests of the working classes is *the* subject uppermost for discussion, and with 'duty' for watchword, rapidly becoming an absorbing thought. A subject so often on the lips must in time be equally grafted on the heart, and bear fruit to perfection. We are all, more or less, sick of worn-out conventionalities, if we dared own the truth."

"*Vogue la galère!* 'Let us break up the tiresome old roof of heaven into new forms,' as

Digitized by Google

Emerson has it," cried Richard, in the same mocking voice.

"Not the roof of heaven, but the clay of earth," answered Basil, with his quiet smile.

"Pshaw! earth does very well as it is; life went on much easier in the good old times than it does now. I am sick of all this pharisaical talk of dearly-beloved brethren and humbugging philanthropy of the present age. One cannot in these days even eat one's dinner in peace, without having the dirty unwashed raised, like the skeleton at the feast, to spoil one's appetite, by suggesting unpalatable ideas and unpleasant images!"

"Mr. Leigh!" indignantly interrupted Grace.

"You, too, Miss Holford! You, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, induced to advocate modern fallacies, and overthrow the champion of your class? Then *'vogue la galère!'* I say again; *à bas les aristocrats*, decidedly. With Ernest Jones my cry shall be, 'Room for the people!' I was not aware, Mr. Rutherford, your opinions bordered so nearly on Communism," exclaimed Richard, angrily walking off.

"I am no leveller," said Basil, good-naturedly. "If every one could begin life on an equality to-morrow, a week hence we should already be differently placed. That 'the poor shall never cease out of the land,' is a clearly-laid-down appointment of Divine Providence. I simply wish people to remember, working men have souls to be saved, and human feelings in



Digitized by Google

common with themselves, and act in accordance. My desire is simply to make them men and women—not, as you would imply, licensed barbarians."

A turn in the pathway here brought them in sight of Oakley Dell. It was a lovely spot in summer, but, even on that fading winter's evening, was very fair to look on. A long line of trees on either hand, their leafless boughs joining overhead—"the cathedral aisles of nature," as Sir Bulwer Lytton has beautifully called such—the vista ending in one magnificent gnarled oak, planted firmly in a rock overhanging the spring from whence the little brook took its rise, whose course they had been following, and which, at the base of this monarch of the forest, formed a well, remarkable for the excellence and purity of its waters; beyond, far as eye could stretch, extended a large wood. The sun glinted through the trees, the water flowed smoothly from the rock, the frost-bound earth looked cold and still, the gay group standing round the well broke the monotonous colouring of the scene. It was pleasant to linger there, though it was winter. So Grace, at all events, seemed to consider, for when the others turned to resume their walk she loitered behind, and so did Richard Leigh.

He stood by her, apparently unnoticed, looking awkward enough, but never attempting to break the silence. Her whole attention seemed engaged with childish eagerness throwing small pebbles, of which she had gathered up a handful, on to the ice-edge of the brook.

Digitized by Google

"You asked me to wait—you said you expressly wanted to speak to me,". remarked Grace, coldly, at last.

"I feared I had again been unfortunate in offending you, Miss Holford, and wished to ask your pardon."

"It did not exactly amount to offending," she said, abruptly.

"Displeased you, then, with my incautious words; it was an unintentional fault."

"I took it as such." A long pause. "It was more disappointment than displeasure," she finally observed, determinedly jerking a very large pebble at a very little bit of ice.

"Then, on sincerely expressing my contrition, I may venture to count myself forgiven?"

"If I really could feel persuaded you did not think as you said."

"You must teach me better. I have had no experience in rural reforms or cottage perfection!" he said, with something of the habitual sneer curling his lips.

A slight frown contracted Grace's brow.

"There is another subject on which I would also speak to you, Miss Holford. After what passed last night, you can scarcely fail to divine my principal object in requesting this kindly-granted interview."

The remaining pebbles dropped from Grace's hands. She looked down abashed, her cheeks crimson. In a few confused, inarticulate words, Richard pleaded his suit. She heard the confession from beginning to end in motionless

Digitized by Google

silence—so long preserved after he had ceased speaking, he began to despair of any reply.

"Are you quite, quite sure you are true when saying you love me?" she asked, to his surprise, at last, half turning towards him, but still with eyes riveted on the ground.

"Have I not told you in words now, and many a time before indirectly, that I love you dearly?"

"Better than all the world?" persisted Grace, looking with searching directness up in Richard's face.

He winced under her scrutiny, but the next moment calmly met her steadfast eye. Grace blushed, and again her eyes sought the ground.

"My questions, doubtless, sound strange," she said, in a low, suppressed voice; "but they are unavoidable. I am sadly alone in the world, Mr. Leigh," she went on, in accents replete with feeling. "I have so few, if any, to care what would make or mar my peace; and at times I have been disposed to fancy you greatly preferred another to me."

Richard winced again. "If you will not credit my word, protestations are unavailing," he said, freezingly.

"Nay; I never said I *dis*believed it: only marriage is a solemn, life-long engagement—in the opinion of many, a union of spirits extending beyond death; it should not be entered upon hurriedly. If I married you, and then found you did not care for me best of all, I should either go mad, murder you, or die myself," she said, wildly.

Digitized by Google

"How can you speak such shocking words? You cannot respond to my love, Miss Holford, or you could not stay to argue thus; true love has faith, and never pauses to calculate."

"I asked my own heart last night, when I was in uninterrupted solitude. I believe its answer was sincere, and it told me ——"

"What?" he eagerly inquired.

"That it had foolishly thrown itself away, and was in the possession of Mr. Richard Leigh," she answered, with shy archness.

"Grace! my own dear Grace! Yet you could doubt me?" he added reproachfully.

"I did not doubt your heart more than my own. Listen to me, for I will be open with you, Mr. Leigh, as I should be. Long before we ever met, there existed one who was some slight object of interest to me. Recall how I crushed back your words last night. Just before you would have spoken to me I had casually learnt this first liking of mine. I cannot call it love—cared for another. I considered it my duty to question my own heart first of all, to discover whether it was or was not gratified pique which made me so wildly happy to learn you loved me. I was satisfied with the result of my investigations. The fancy of an unoccupied heart—a liking that never took a name, had no place there—my love was wholly yours. Now, there must be no further doubts or concealments between us; but perfect confidence and faith henceforward and always."

"Grace, you are a noble creature! you need

Digitized by Google

not fear to commit your happiness to my keeping!"

She looked up trustingly in the admiring face that bent over her, yet sighed as she placed her hand in his.

They walked home together; it was useless trying to overtake the others now. Before their walk was ended Richard had succeeded in chasing away the foreboding cloud from her heart, and Grace felt reassured and happy. It was late when they reached Holford Manor—they parted at the door. Grace hastened to her room. Richard stood awhile in the entrance-porch. He looked up at the old house; he looked over the wide park, at the noble shadowing trees, on which the clear round moon was shining down. "Mine!" he exclaimed aloud, in an exulting, rapturous tone, as if fondly hugging the knowledge to his heart. "Mine!" Then strode across the hall with an air of proud possessorship, and passed into the mahogany parlour—his usual resort at that hour.

It was not vacant; Mary was there, assiduously working. Her face was turned from the door; his first impulse was to draw back.

"Better from me than another," he muttered. So, entering the room, he closed the door, and with a little nod of recognition as he passed her, drew a chair to the fire, and in his usual lounging way threw himself into it.

"Are you only just returned?" she asked, with some astonishment.

"About five minutes ago."

Digitized by Google

"How late you are! Then, I suppose, you reached the Dell?"

"Yes."

"Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"I believe so."

"You deal in laconics!"

"Where is Old Kirkland?"

"I left him in the drawing-room about half-an-hour ago, reading the evening papers."

"Do you happen to remember a conversation we had in this room two or three months ago, Mary?"

"Perfectly."

"I told you then I meant to win the heiress; give me joy at having to announce to you my engagement with Miss Holford."

"Your news is little surprise to me; after your marked attentions last night, I have been momentarily expecting this notification," she answered, coldly.

He furtively glanced towards her. Miss Leigh was working as if life depended on the rapidity with which she could ply her needle.

"I do wish you joy, Richard—great joy, and lasting happiness," she said, quickly, the next moment; "I sincerely trust you will both be very, very happy."

"Thank you, Mary; that I am sure you do, and feel convinced your good wishes are so genuine, they must infallibly ensure their own realisation," he answered, speaking in a matter-of-fact, business-like way. As yet no one else is acquainted with our engagement," he went on,

Digitized by Google

hurriedly. "So keep the secret for this evening. Better not even let Grace know I have told you. It might make her anxious for its preservation," he stammered out, with precipitation. "Pity me to-morrow, having humbly to ask the consent of innumerable uncles, aunts, and guardians! I expect they will give me no end of trouble, and devoutly wish my fair *fiancée* was of age. I thought I would tell you myself," he added, with embarrassment, rising and going up to his cousin.

"It was very kind, very thoughtful of you," replied the poor girl, likewise standing up, intending to leave him.

She looked so numbed, so torpid, Richard watched her with some alarm.

"There are moments in life, when the heart is so full of emotion,
That if by chance it be shaken, or into its depths like a pebble
Drops some careless word, it overflows, and its secret,
Spilt on the ground like water, can never be gathered together."

So had it been with Mary Leigh. The few words Richard had last addressed her, though so common-place, had completely subdued her; his fixed gaze directed upon her increased her nervousness. She turned deadly pale, and involuntarily caught hold of a chair for support; he sprang to her side, passing his arm lightly round her to uphold.

"What! tears, Mary?"

Now, completely losing her self-control, she

Digitized by Google

laid her head down on his shoulder and sobbed aloud. He neither drew her to him nor repulsed her—only let her weep there.

"You must not cry, dear," he said quietly, at last.

"It is so foolish of me, when I am so very glad," she answered, raising her head, and trying her best to look cheerful.

"Very glad, are you?" he uncertainly remarked, slightly detaining her.

"Yes; very, very, very glad," she said, earnestly.

"One day I hope you may be equally happy, Mary."

She smiled faintly, and, withdrawing from his hold, collected her work together, and bravely walked away.

"Very, very glad!" repeated Richard, dreamily, looking up at the ceiling, as he resumed his arm-chair, and stretched himself before the fire—"Very, very glad! I think I never in all my life saw a girl so knocked up by a ball as she appears to be this evening."

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXIV.

The curtains were drawn, the fire cheerfully blazing, the tea-equipage on the table—all looked the picture of comfort at Grantham Cottage. Ermentrude had just entered the drawing-room; she had been with Sybil ever since dinner, and had now descended to perform the office of tea-maker for John and Basil. Mr. Rutherford preferred the old-fashioned custom of having his tea made in the apartment.

The gentlemen were still in the dining-room; nine o'clock had struck, but no sound announced their coming: what could have happened to detain them in this unusual manner? A little whisper of conscience, perhaps, tended to make Miss Kirkland doubly anxious. She was tired from the effects of the ball, tired from her long walk that day, and was half asleep over her book, when, the door opening, her apprehensions were ended. The trifling circumstance of Basil entering alone renewed her nervous fears. Without saying a word he walked straight up to the fire, and standing on the rug directly faced her. "How grave he looks!" thought Uda, as she busied herself with the cups and saucers to hide her embarrassment.

Digitized by Google

"It is so late, you must almost have given us up in despair! You will pardon our tardy appearance, when I tell you I have been having a long talk with John."

Her sole reply was an awkwardly-uttered, prolonged, "Oh!"—"Aunt Sybil seems no better to-night," she put in, hurriedly.

"I am sorry for that; but a cold will always have its way before it mends," observed Basil.

To which incontrovertible truism Uda made no answer.

"Being conversationably inclined, I now want a long talk with you, Ermentrude."

"Is not John coming to tea?" she asked, looking very considerably alarmed at this notification.

"Not yet awhile; but you may as well give me mine. I dare say you would as willingly I should be occupied with it. For once in life I am going to lecture you, Uda. What can be the meaning of your refusing John?" he said, taking up his cup and walking away from her. "The poor fellow is very miserable."

"He cannot be more miserable than I am," answered Uda, sorrowfully.

"You are not the woman to play with any man's feelings, or I should almost be inclined, in this instance, to accuse you of so doing. You have known John from childhood—you have always professed a strong regard for him—have evidently preferred his society to that of other men—have given him, to my fancy, every encouragement woman could give—yet now, after seven years'

Digitized by Google

constancy, when he plainly speaks to you on the subject, you assure him his love is not returned, and decline, in no measured words, any further allusion to the matter."

"Has Mr. Vaughan commissioned you to plead his cause?" she haughtily inquired.

"Years ago," pursued Basil, unheeding the interruption, still standing with averted face—"years ago, when you were both children at Hammerton, John Vaughan told me he hoped eventually to claim you as his wife. I mocked at the idea of his love, treating it as the evanescent passion of a boy; he left it to time to prove my error—only promising never to refer to his feelings to you without my permission. *I* resumed the subject before the ball, and finding his attachment had only strengthened with time—mistaken as, I regret to say, events have proved me—*I* urged him to tell you the truth. I had noticed you were out of spirits, Uda, and believed that delay and doubt were preying on your mind. John was too generous to tell me the consequences of my advice until I asked what had occurred, to-night after you left us; he never requested me to plead his cause, I do it unsolicited."

"It is quite useless, Mr. Rutherford; my answer was not lightly given. Deeply as it pains me to distress one whom I love — love as a brother; a dear, true friend—bitterly as the confession of John's love has wounded my self-respect—I can give no other reply. Oh, if you only knew how sorely my heart has been aching

Digitized by Google

all day long, how wretched, how humiliated I feel, you would not torture it further."

For the first time he looked at her as she sat before him, depressed and sad, her face pale and wan.

"There must be some latent cause," he said, in a suffocated voice, "to make you so determined in your rejection of one so long known, so strongly esteemed. Uda, will you trust in me, and tell me if your heart be given to any one else?

He waited breathlessly for her reply—none came. She was strongly agitated, her face suffused with blushes.

"Uda, for the sake of Heaven, tell me!" he said, impetuously.

She looked up, startled at his vehemence—met his eye; then her head drooped down.

"I cannot deceive you," she said, trembling violently.

She spoke so low he was obliged to bend forward to catch her words. He began to pace the room—she sank back in her chair, burying her face in her hands.

"One word more, Uda," he said, stopping his perturbed walk, leaning over the back of her chair, speaking in the tenderest, kindest voice imaginable. "Dear Uda! tell me his name; do not fear to confide in me."

"I cannot; indeed I cannot!" she murmured tremulously.

"He is not—— but no, you could not love one unworthy of you, Uda."

"No, not unworthy," she said, warmly, a

Digitized by Google

bright smile lighting up her face; "only too good, too perfect for me. Mr. Rutherford, you are very cruel to extort such words from me," she added, trying to rally her spirits.

"My intentions are not cruel, Uda! I wish to be assured of the truth, because I would so gladly help you in any way that lay in my power. There is evidently difficulty besetting your path," he said, resuming his walk. "Is poverty the barrier? because that might be easily surmounted."

"No!"

"Does opposition darken your path?"

She shook her head.

"I should be so very grateful if you would ask me no more questions, Mr. Rutherford."

"What makes you so sad, Uda?" She made no reply. "Tell me the truth," he went on; "I cannot bear to see you unhappy, as you have looked of late. Has this mysterious unknown told you he loves you? Uda, *does* he love you?"

Cheek and forehead grew crimson, then faded to an ashy paleness.

"You are very merciless," she said, despairingly; "you force my secret from me. Mine is an unshared attachment," she went on, bitterly. "Have I said enough? have I lowered myself sufficiently in your esteem now? Oh, Mr. Rutherford! it was hard to make me tell you this; let me go away, and pain me no more."

"Poor child!" he said, pityingly; "your sad secret is very safe with me; it shall be respected

Digitized by Google

as if it were my own. But oh, Uda! do not say you have lowered yourself in my eyes. I honour your candour; I respect the unselfish simplicity of your heart: but I do not believe you could so entirely have given your love away without some imagined encouragement in the first instance, even if it proved illusory. I can only pray that God may make the happy possessor worthy of the priceless treasure he has won. I press your confidence no more; forgive me that I have been so importunate. Always tell me your troubles, Uda; it is some comfort, in the midst of affliction, to confide in those who really feel and sympathise with us. It is a struggling, bitter world: I was anxious to shield you from sorrow, and gladly would have done what I could to make you happy after your heart's desire."

"I know you would," murmured Uda, slowly rising and going up to him.

"When I spoke to you to-day out walking, about the probability of your leaving us, I believed I was addressing a promised bride. Your answer and John's absence, which had not struck me as peculiar before, somewhat enlightened me as to what had probably occurred. Human ties with all their vicissitudes, contradictions, and disappointments, are often made our hardest means of trial; only, ever remember that the All-Good never afflicts willingly—only when it is absolutely necessary to bring our stubborn, idol-seeking hearts to Him. Our momentary afflictions are of little account, if so viewed. And

Digitized by Google

now, dear, having preached you my little sermon, go to your room and seek the rest you so much need. Leave John to me; I will do my best to comfort him."

His countenance was thoughtful, but serene, as he shook hands with her, and stooping down imprinted a grave, kindly kiss upon her youthful brow; but when she had turned to leave him an expression of troubled agony passed across his face. He stood with clasped hands, following her with his eyes until the door closed behind her; then gulping down his tea until it nearly choked him, he went off to John.

Uda slowly walked up-stairs to bid Sybil good night, maintaining her composure until she had left her. Once alone, her fortitude quite gave way, she shed torrents of tears, and for a long time continued to weep like a grieving child.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXV.

THERE were obstacles innumerable to be surmounted before Grace's acceptance of Richard Leigh could pass into a formally-declared engagement. He was no favourite with Sybil, and she was hard to persuade that Grace could have thrown away her love on one so little deserving. In Miss Rutherford's opinion her ward was making a hurried, desperate conclusion to a very short acquaintanceship; and though she could not steel her heart positively to forbid her choice, she was very anxious that Grace should wait awhile, giving more time to consideration before seriously entering upon so solemn, so binding an engagement, lest, when it was too late, she should discover she had given her promise to an ideal, rather than a genuine object. But waiting was not Grace's fashion; "her mind was made up," she said; "her happiness at stake—she could not, would not wait." She laughed back the idea of change and tardy repentance. "What should make her change? If their acquaintanceship *had* been brief, they had been constantly together during the time; she knew every turn and twist of his character."



Digitized by Google

"She was a clever, penetrating woman indeed, if she did," Basil significantly remarked, when his sister repeated to him the conversation. "The sole point at issue," Grace, in fine, coolly observed, "resolved itself into the question, whether they should marry at once, with Sybil's consent, or wait until she was of age, and free to go her own way without it?"

Grace was very wilful and naughty, and sadly worried poor Sybil; who, between her prejudice against Richard, her misgivings for Grace's prospect of future happiness, and the sad remembrance of the vanished dream of her own blighted youth — blighted by sagacious opposition, spent a struggling, troublesome life of painful indecision.

Basil, when his sister consulted him on the subject, only added to her perplexity, by passing judgment on Richard in no measured terms, at the same time persisting in taking a neutral part; and finding Sybil was determined to press his services into requisition, ended by seeking safety in flight, and fairly ran away from Grantham.

Mrs. Sherburne preached in favour of wisdom, and against hasty marriages, with little effect. Grace was unconquerable. She finally condescended to enlist Uda as advocate in her behalf, whose serious nature, easily persuaded that it was with Grace as, similarly situated, it would have been with her — a question of life, happiness, or sorrow — warmly espoused her cause, and proved an invaluable aid. She rea-

Digitized by Google

soned down Sybil's prejudices; she smoothed away difficulties; even succeeded in mollifying Mr. Kirkland, until, though still loudly persisting Richard should never see a penny of his money, she induced him to speak kindly of his future prospects, and, finally, to consult Ermentrude apart, respecting a handsome, suitable gift for the bride elect.

Richard, during this time of contention, took life with his accustomed imperturbability; he left all the hard work to Grace, and contented himself with tenderly suggesting to her vigorous advice. "It would all come right in the end—the great thing in this world was to take things coolly." He proved himself correct in his surmise—things did come straight at last. Sybil relented, Mr. Kirkland smiled, and Mrs. Leigh was allowed to give open expression to her delight, and abandon the difficult part she had lately thought fit to assume, of trying to please everybody's different opinion.

The engagement was publicly announced; Grace and Richard looked upon as affianced lovers; and, what Uda considered better than all, an early day fixed for Basil's return to Grantham.

A faint echo of sorrow still floated about their path, in Mary's fading beauty and Mrs. Sherburne's doleful looks and sighs; but these were trifles, on which they never expended notice.

The wedding was fixed to take place after Easter; meanwhile, the betrothed seemed Con-

Digitized by Google

tentment personified. Grace appeared only to live for Richard; with the deep, strong power of loving appertaining to her impulsive nature, perfected by opposition, she had now thrown away her whole heart on one who little deserved such wild devotion. This passionate worship was very different from the meek entireness with which Uda had equally undividedly given away her unchangeable love.

But a fortnight remained to the time fixed for the wedding; Mrs. Sherburne was spending a few days at Grantham; Mr. Rutherford had returned thither: with so much preparation proceeding, Sybil found it a great comfort to have him near at hand for consultation. So, good-naturedly, he came, and was most unsparingly victimised.

It was on a lovely evening of early spring, Basil had just returned from a long, solitary ride; having dismounted at the stables, he was leaving the yard, when a sort of half dog-cart, half brake, drove in, containing two occupants. In the driver, a shrewd-faced, hard-featured man, he recognised the Ellchurch land-steward; in the portly-looking personage by his side the major-domo of the establishment, an old, privileged domestic, grown grey in the service of the Sherburne family.

On first catching sight of Mr. Rutherford the men looked at one another, hesitated, and finally pulled up; but never much occupied with the affairs of others, and naturally con-

Digitized by Google

cluding they had business to transact with Mrs. Sherburne, he merely returned their salutations and passed on.

A short parley ensued, the elder man descended from the vehicle, and by the time Basil had reached the gate, had breathlessly overtaken him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but might I be allowed a few moments' conversation?"

"Certainly," answered Basil, wheeling round in obedience to the demand upon his attention.

"I was not aware you were in the neighbourhood, sir," continued Mr. Martin, with the politest of bows; "but having met with you so opportunely, Mr. Holmes and I are of opinion that our better plan would be to consult with you on the matter which brings us here to-day, instead of with my daughter, as was our first intention. My daughter fills the situation of maid to Mrs. Sherburne, as I dare say you know, sir."

Basil, looking the picture of boredom, shook his head.

"He really was not aware of the circumstance. How should he be?"

"Very true, sir," urbanely replied the old servant, who was evidently in the agitated-communicative mood just at the moment. "A good girl, sir; but women are apt to be overpowered by their feelings when most required to have their wits about them; and Fanny has a very tender heart. I look upon this meeting with you as quite providential under the circum-

Digitized by Google

stances. I was just saying so to Mr. Holmes yonder."

"Is anything the matter, then?" asked Basil, wearily. "I trust, nothing of serious importance."

"I wish I could say that, sir. This evening's post brought us melancholy news. My poor master, sir!"

"Good God! what of him?" exclaimed Basil, anxiously, struck with the expression of the man's face.

"Dead, sir!"

"Dead?" gasped out Mr. Rutherford.

"Yes, sir. Sad, very sad, to be cut off thus in the prime of life; such a fine, noble-looking gentleman! I remember his father before him, and have known him from a boy—a manly, healthy little fellow, he always was, to be sure. And to think of my grey hairs surviving him!" said Martin, piteously, wiping away his tears with the back of his hand.

"What a terrible shock this will be to Mrs. Sherburne!"

"Very true, sir; who will like to break the news to her?"

"How did intelligence of this sad event reach you?" inquired Basil.

"Mr. Holmes received a letter from a Mr. Richmond, a friend of my master's. It seems, poor gentleman! he has been out of health for some time past—though none of us knew it. Ah! sir, no good ever came yet to Englishmen from loitering about in foreign parts. There

Digitized by Google

is an enclosure for Mrs. Sherburne in the letter; but he wrote direct to Mr. Holmes, thinking, if her loss was not gently broken, the blow might be too much for her. They are bringing the body to England. Poor master wished to lie alongside his own people. Perhaps you might like to see the letter itself, sir; Mr. Holmes has it in his pocket."

It told little more. Ralph Sherburne, travelling with a party of friends in Switzerland, had been attacked with ague from malaria, which affected his heart. Death had come to him very suddenly.

"My sister will be the best person to break the intelligence to Mrs. Sherburne," said Basil, as he restored the letter. "I will go to her at once, and prepare her for her melancholy task. You had best put up your horse and wait for further orders. Miss Rutherford's people will take every care of you."

With his usual forethought, adding many cautions to prevent the news from being hastily conveyed to Ermentrude, Basil went in search of Sybil.

On inquiry he learned she had walked over to the Manor with Grace, and had not yet returned. It was now nearly five o'clock. Basil delayed another quarter of an hour; then decided, with the men waiting, he must delegate the trying office to Uda.

He found her and Mrs. Sherburne tying up plants in the greenhouse, under the waning light, their task rapidly becoming an apology

Digitized by Google

for employment. As he approached, he heard them talking so cheerfully together, he paused on the threshold, reluctant to be the messenger of woe, the enlightener of such calm unconsciousness.

Uda was the first to perceive him.

"We have been meritoriously industrious in your absence," gaily she called out to him; "repotting innumerable young plants, rearranging all these lower shelves. I want you to admire my hyacinths; they are lovely this spring, and so fragrant."

He praised her flowers, letting her lead him about in hopes of finding the opportunity he wanted, to speak to her alone; but the space was limited, and it was impossible to escape out of the way of Mrs. Sherburne's quick powers of hearing.

On one pretext or another vainly he tried to separate them.

"How absent you are!" remarked Uda, at last. "Three times I have addressed you; and the only answer I have received has been a random question!"

"I am convinced something is the matter, Uda," whispered Mrs. Sherburne, approaching her niece; "only examine his countenance."

Uda obeyed.

"What makes you look so serious, Mr. Rutherford? Why do you sigh? *Is* anything the matter?" she asked, imploringly, suddenly becoming infected with the fears of her companion.

Digitized by Google

"I am positive something has occurred to disturb you," observed Mrs. Sherburne, coming forward. "If it relates to me, the kinder part will be to tell it at once; and if it does not concern me, why look so pityingly towards me?"

"Uda, I have tried my best to call you away from her, and you would not heed me. Break the ill news as gently as possible. I cannot do it. Her husband is dead. Here, take this letter," hurriedly whispered Basil, placing Mr. Richmond's epistle in her hands.

Then, ashamed of his cowardice, but lacking nerve to stay, he hastened away.

Uda stood like one petrified to the spot where he had left her, with stiff awkwardness holding out the letter.

"What is it, Uda?" asked Mrs. Sherburne, in an apprehensive tone, slowing drawing near.

"Oh, dearest Aunt Ermentrude! how shall I ever tell you? No wonder Mr. Rutherford could not!" she answered, throwing her arms round her.

Ermentrude seized the hand that held the letter—read the address to Holmes—saw the foreign paper and postmark. With dread anticipativeness she turned her large, questioning eyes, upon her niece.

"I have not read it yet. Let me do so first. He only told me ——"

"My husband is ill—dying! I feel assured of it," urged Ermentrude, with unnatural com-

Digitized by Google

posure. "Let me read it, Uda! It is my right to do so!"

Drawing the letter from Uda's unopposing hands, Mrs. Sherburne went to the door, and, well as the gathering darkness would allow, rapidly perused the contents.

"Dead!" she exclaimed, in a voice of such thrilling agony, the dismal grief of the sound vibrated through every fibre of Uda's heart. "Oh, if only once more, if only for one brief moment it had been but the merciful will of God to let me see him again!" in a moaning, heartrung voice, she murmured on. "Dead! How awful! Dead! Sundered for ever!" she said, desolately looking at Uda.

"Did you see this enclosure? it dropped from the letter,"—wishing to rouse her, she gently observed, offering her aunt the paper addressed to her.

Mrs. Sherburne sat down on the doorstep and slowly conned it over, Uda standing a short distance off, mute, awed before such expressionless sorrow.

"There was a time," mused Ermentrude, as if addressing her Dead, "when I never thought I could have bemoaned you thus! These are the last words he will ever speak to me, Uda," she said, giving her the letter; "he wrote them on his deathbed — wrote so lovingly, so kindly. Oh, Ralph, Ralph! if only you could come back to me, for ever such a little while! He asks me to forgive him, Uda; I, who did so little for him,

Digitized by Google

who left undone so much I should have done! I, his unloving wife! I would give many years of my own life, not only to assure him I forgive, but to hear him say I am forgiven!"

Uda's tears fell fast, as in her turn she read the letter. The few indistinct, tremulous lines were, indeed, moving for any feeling heart to peruse. Penitent, sorrowful outpourings of a contrite heart, written by a dying hand, expressing the repentance of the writer for neglect and wrongs which he had wrought, praying for pardon.

And there, motionless and rigid, the widow sat, on those stone steps; a look of passive misery on her face; her eyes fixed on the setting sun, sinking slowly to rest immediately before her.

"How does she bear it, Uda?" asked Basil, anxiously, meeting Miss Kirkland some time later, coming down-stairs from Mrs. Sherburne's apartment.

"I hardly know,—she evidently feels it acutely; but was like ice until Aunt Sybil came to her. She cried then, and tears seemed to do her good. She can scarcely realise it as yet, I should imagine,—widowhood has come upon her so suddenly. I have been carrying messages for her to Holmes and Martin, and now am about to send them back to Ellchurch with final orders. We have persuaded Aunt Ermentrude to stay here for to-night; she could do no good if she went home, so late as it is, and it would be very lonely for her. She wishes me to go with her there

Digitized by Google

to-morrow; which of course, with your permission, I shall gladly do."

"You good little soul!" said Basil, looking at her approvingly, "how few at your age would be so willing to walk hand-in-hand with Sorrow."

"I am so used to it," she said, simply, her eyes filling with tears. "You must try all you can to cheer up poor Grace in my absence," she thoughtfully continued; "I am so sorry for her."

"I never thought of Grace, but of course as a cousin, and by marriage an uncle. Mr. Sherburne's death must cause a postponement of her marriage."

"Just so. She was the second consideration that crossed my brain; it is usually reckoned ominous to put off a wedding, when once the day has been definitively settled."

"Are you so superstitious, Uda?"

"If *I* am not, Grace is,—but I have not had as yet a minute to spare for her."

"I am perfectly ashamed of myself, when I remember how ignominiously I ran away and left the painful announcement all to you," said Basil, apologetically.

"It was better so, and only natural—men are softer-hearted when sorrow is abroad than women. We are early taught to harden our hearts into outward calmness, and crush down into concealment our strongest feelings."

"And to be firm to bear, high-hearted to console, heroic in action, ever forgetful of self for the sake of others," said Basil, with admiring affection.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Richard Leigh was again staying at Holford Manor. He made a point of being there on the day on which his marriage was to have taken place, and insisted on Grace being allowed to spend it with his family.

Grace had been willingly obedient to his wish. She went there early in the morning to return next day, anticipating a very happy time. It had not answered her expectations. Against her will she had been the whole while feeling very mournful and thoughtful; and, what was worse than all, could not shake off the unaccountable sensation of heavy oppression, which seemed choking up all powers of interest and aim in her heart. It had been a stormy day of blustering wind and pelting rain, that might possibly account for her unwonted depression. Indeed the relief was great, not only to Grace, but to the spirits of all the party, when the shutters closed from before them the dismal outer world, and they had the pleasant vision of warm fires and lighted rooms to replace the gloomy prospect beyond the windows.

In the evening they formed a cheerful fireside group: the three ladies working; Richard,

Digitized by Google

as usual, collecting superficial knowledge from some reviewing magazine. For some time conversation had flagged; all seemed intent on their diverse employments.

"The wind is roaring louder than ever," said Grace, breaking the silence. "How weird it sounds, wailing and rushing round the house! I never like to hear it thus. Do you know," she said, laughing, "a high wind is, I believe, the only thing in creation that makes me sensible of fear? I always fancy, when I hear it blowing with such hollow, unearthly excitement, that, as report gives them credit, the powers of darkness must be actually abroad."

"It is, indeed, an awful gale," murmured Mary. "A sort of night which always sends my thoughts far out upon the sea. How many beating hearts there must be now upon the coast, aching with anxiety for the safety of those dear to them!"

"Certainly, Mary, you have the happiest knack of making inopportune remarks," observed Mrs. Leigh, reprovingly; "your head seems always filled with ideas of the most dismal description. You should strive to check that propensity, my love, and endeavour to adapt your conversation in a more lively manner, especially when you see your friends are not in their brightest mood."

Another dead silence. The windows rattled, the rain dashed against the panes, the oak wainscoat cracked, the gust blew fiercely up the long, rambling passages of the old house. In

Digitized by Google

the midst of the wild riot of the elements the cry of an owl, shrill and discordant, was distinctly audible, sounding close to the mansion.

"Again that bird!" exclaimed Miss Holford, with a perceptible shudder.

"Grace, dear, what makes you so nervous to-night — what ails you?" soothingly asked Richard, who, ever since she had first spoken, had been watching her with solicitude, now going up and hanging over her chair.

"That species of owl never screams near this house without presaging sorrow to some member of the Holford family," she whispered, with trepidation.

"How can you allow yourself to be so foolishly superstitious! I would advise an instant reference to the comprehensive pages of *The Reason Why*, as the best panacea to your fears; there you will learn the satisfactory explanation, that owls only scream in that alarming manner 'because they are pleasurably excited by a favourable change in the atmosphere:' an unmelodious mode of expressing satisfaction, I grant you, but presaging only that it will be a fine day to-morrow," replied Richard, laughing.

"Mock my fears whilst you may, but mark my words, and see if events do not prove them true. That bird was screaming in that unearthly manner by my window before I came down to dinner. All old families have their Banshee, you know: it is a price they pay for their antiquity," she said, trying to smile off her terrors.

Digitized by Google

"Omens follow those that seek them, and no others, depend upon it. I gave you credit, Grace, for sense above giving way to such weakness."

"Do not scold me for my folly," she answered, looking up in his face with a reassured smile; "we cannot always be brave-hearted, or control our sensations."

Another pause ensued. Leaning back in her chair, Grace diligently worked on at the purse she was making; Richard still lingering near her, idly turning over the pages of his book.

"Mary, my dear," at this juncture observed Mrs. Leigh, "suppose you were to give us some music—just a merry tune or two, to cheer us up a little."

Mary at once proceeded to comply with her request, Richard dutifully opening the instrument and lighting the candles for her; then, returning to Grace's side, he drew forward a chair and sat down beside her.

Mary played the required lively airs, until her music had the gratifying effect of closing Mrs. Leigh's eyelids in a placid, soothing slumber; then, unrestrainedly following the bent of her own taste instead, in fitful and wayward harmony she strung together, with finest taste and power, dreamy passages from Nocturnes and Rêveries, wild snatches of German music, melodious passages of Italian stage songs,—unconsciously telling, in the plaintive, varying measure, the story of a shattered love, a hard agony of

Digitized by Google

spirit strife, a stricken heart—unheeded by her companions, unheeding them—music to Mary was comfort and happiness.

"I wish, Mary," suddenly said Richard Leigh, "you would let me hear my old favourite, 'Pourquoi?' I have not been treated to it for such a long time."

A slight gesture of deprecation as she turned quickly towards him, and one beseeching look. He never heeded the meek, entreating eyes; he was holding a skein of silk for Grace to wind —his gaze was riveted upon her.

"I cannot remember it. I forget where I have put the music."

"Well, try what you can do. You never need notes, I know; and I particularly want Grace to hear it."

This was the climax. Mary sighed heavily; but, after uncertainly trying over a few passages, patiently began her allotted task.

"Do you know the music?" she heard him asking Miss Holford. "It is a Rêverie by Ascher," he went on in explanation; "the theme, three lines by Victor Hugo:—

'Si vous n'avez rien à me dire,
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi?
Pourquoi me faire ce sourire?'

The subject is comprehensive to a vivid imagination, fully grasped by the composer; and Mary plays it admirably."

The piece was peculiarly associated with happy hours of a Past, dedicated to Richard



Digitized by Google

Leigh; every note was a living memory of him. That evening Mary did, indeed, play it admirably. Already feeling acutely, stung to the quick by the inconsiderateness of his request, struggling with the vague regrets and shapeless yearnings of a bleeding heart, she poured forth her whole soul through the medium of the notes beneath her fingers.

The final pianissimo chord was struck, the last vibration died away; tired and disquieted, awakened from abstraction to every-day consciousness, she looked round with an indefinite wish for the repose and sustenance of appreciation.

Mrs. Leigh still softly slumbered. Richard and Grace, hand locked in hand, were conversing in a low tone together. A carelessly uttered "Thank you" from one, an indifferent "Very pretty" from the other, was all the heed bestowed on what had cost her such suffering to give them pleasure. A bitter sense of isolation, of impatience at her solitude of spirit, took possession of Mary's mind. She rose abruptly with the intention of stealing away, to seek apart rest for throbbing heart and aching head; the centre table had been moved up close to the hearth, Mrs. Leigh's sleeping form blocked up the passage to the door; unwilling to disturb her, Mary pushed in sideways between the chair and fire — the space was small, the grate low and projecting; her back was turned to it; the light dress she wore touched the bars, in an instant it was blazing!

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, help me! — Richard,

Digitized by Google

do come to me!" she cried out in the piercing accents of despair, clasping her hands distractedly together, only sufficiently collected to stand perfectly still.

Roused from her sleep, Mrs. Leigh shrieked aloud; Richard, for the moment aghast and paralysed, seemed incapable of action. Grace alone sprang to the rescue. Rapid as lightning she was at her side; with the strength of desperation had forced down the frightened girl on the floor, and tearing up the rug, closely wound it round Mary's slight form.

"Hush, hush! do not scream, do not struggle so! only lie down—where you are, flat and quiet as possible—it is your only chance of safety. You must not cling so to my arm, or I can do nothing; let me have free use of it. Thank God! I believe the fire is now out," breathlessly gasped Grace.

Her strength was insufficient to hold the covering with such straining tightness any longer; she drew back exhausted. Alas! she had boasted too soon—she had but temporarily restrained the fire by the exclusion of air, not extinguished it. As her grasp relaxed, the rug partially unwound, the flames rushed up again in a pyramid of light. Mary gave one wild scream, tossed her arms distractedly in the air—her eyes starting from her head in terror. With undaunted presence of mind, a second time Grace pressed the rug over her; and now Richard was by her side, his stronger clasp soon quenching the blaze. All danger was over; assistance had

Digitized by Google

been so promptly rendered, the injuries Mary had received from the fire had been slight: yet there she lay, senseless, motionless. Together they raised her. Leaving her to Richard's care, Grace now flew to the assistance of Mrs. Leigh, who had thrown herself on the sofa in violent hysterics.

In her usual impulsive manner, Miss Holford seized a vase from off the table, and tossing out the flowers it held, dashed the water into her face. The good effect was instantaneous! Mrs. Leigh changed to the indignant stage, ceased screaming, and began to wipe off the flowing stream with extraordinary vigour. Grace wrung her hands in agony, her right hand was dreadfully burnt. Then, for the first time with a thought for self, she remembered he was present who that day was to have vowed before God and man to love, cherish, and protect her before all others, so long as life should last,—little *he* recked of her: kneeling by Mary's insensible form, he was pouring out in incoherent, frantic words, a thousand passionate expressions of love and fear. With lips tightly pressed, a withering expression of scorn upon her face, Grace swept by him and rang the bell.

The offices at Holford were situated so far from the room they were occupying, no one had heard the screams, or been aware that anything unusual had been occurring; now, alarmed by Grace's rapidly-repeated summons, servants came trooping in. She gave her orders with the clear composure that had marked her spirited

Digitized by Google

conduct throughout a fearful scene, which, if long in narration, had in action been but the work of comparatively few moments; words travel by parliamentary train, whilst thought, feeling, and marked events invariably go by rapid express.

"Send Mrs. Leigh's maid to her here," she said, as firmly as she could command her voice. "And mine to Miss Leigh's room. Her dress has caught fire; but I trust no serious result has ensued. Order a horse to be saddled without delay, for Mr. Leigh to go for Dr. Harrison. Now, do not waste time in looking at one another," she added, with good-natured severity, noticing the frightened faces, and that no one seemed disposed to move; "rapidity of action is the only way in which you can be of any real service . . . . Yes, you must go for the doctor," she said, as she busied herself with Mary in answer to a murmur of resistance on Richard's part. "I can trust to your quickness better than to any one else. I wish Mr. Harrison to be here promptly. I do not like this continued insensibility. The ride will do you no harm. Now carry her up to her room, only remember—there you must leave us."

In silence he obeyed, awed into subjection by her steadfast manner.

She watched him down-stairs again, ran after him and saw him start. A deep moan escaped from the depths of her heart as she reascended; it was the only symptom of emotion she had betrayed. Miss Leigh still lay in a stupor, from which it was long before she slowly

Digitized by Google

recovered. With her maid's assistance, Grace occupied herself until the doctor came in applying restoratives, and bathing the few trifling burns she had received in cold water. Grace's own hand had suffered far more seriously. The doctor considered her with astonishment when at last she showed it to him, marvelling how she could have done so much for others whilst enduring the torturing pain she must all the time have been undergoing. Her composure throughout was marvellous to witness.

"Do you think she will die?" asked Richard, in a hollow voice, as Grace found him hovering near the door, on leaving Mary's room to go to her own.

"I sincerely trust not. I will honestly tell you, Mr. Harrison is anxious about her; not from the burns, they are trifling, but from the effects of the shock to her nervous system: her exhaustion is pitiable to witness, her strength quite prostrate. She must be kept perfectly quiet: there is much to be guarded against, still I hope there exists no actual danger at present."

"If she dies, I shall have killed her!" exclaimed he, with distraction, turning a glassy, vacant look on Grace.

"I cannot stop to listen to confessions now," she said, coldly. "I do not wish to be unkind, but my powers of endurance are at this moment strained almost past bearing."

"Oh, Grace, what do we not owe to you, the preserver of Mary's life from such a fearful, fearful death! If it had not been for your pre-

Digitized by Google

sence of mind, where would she have been now?" he observed, shuddering, covering his eyes with his hands.

"I but acted as any one with a cool head and reasoning faculties must have done, under the same circumstances," she answered, negligently.

He looked repressed. "I hope you are now going to consider yourself a little, Grace?" he said, timidly. "You are cruelly over-exerting yourself in the kindness of your heart; you need quiet—indeed you *must* rest, for my sake," he added, gaining confidence.

"For *your* sake!" she repeated, scornfully.

"I have sent over to Grantham to ask Uda to come to you, thinking her presence might be a comfort," he continued, humbly.

For the first time her lip quivered.

"It was kind," she said, quickly; then hurriedly turned to leave him. In her haste she could not open the door of the corridor, through which her way led, with her left hand, and was forced to bring forward its poor maimed fellow, which previously she had held concealed from observation.

"Good heavens! what ails your hand?" asked Richard, who, seeing her difficulty, though ignorant of the cause, had advanced to aid her.

"Only burnt rather worse than the other."

"I had no idea you had suffered by your noble conduct; you never told me," he said, reproachfully.

Digitized by Google

"I dare say not—why should I?" she answered, imperviously.

"Is it much pain?—very badly burnt?"

She hesitated a moment, then coolly began to remove the bandages.

"There," she said; "if it will give you any satisfaction to see it," holding it out to him, all blistered and scorched.

He shrunk and turned away from the painful spectacle.

"Oh, Grace, how very dreadful! And you *can* go about and nurse others when you must be suffering so dreadfully—my poor darling!"

"Ah, poor hand! it is a pitiable object, truly—not quite the same as when it rested quietly in yours some few hours ago. But I like the pain, it revives me," she said savagely, for his tenderness was quite unnerving her, and she was resolved to resist to the uttermost any betrayal of weakness. He looked as though he longed to say more, only her strange manner cowed him.

"Let me, at all events, tie it up again for you before you leave me," he said, imploringly.

"As you will," relinquishing it to him: she shuddered at his touch, whilst he tenderly replaced plaisters and coverings.

"I told you that horrid bird boded no good; it is always an ill omen to the Holfords," she observed, excitedly. He made no reply. "There, that will do; you hurt me so. Oh! I cannot bear it any longer," she added, wildly, and

Digitized by Google

snatching her hand from him, she began impatiently to remove the dressings he had been arranging.

"Grace, what do you mean? have you quite lost possession of your senses?"

"This morning we were very happy; a long stretch of life and happiness seemed extending before us. To-night we have had fearful warning of the uncertainty of life brought before us; and as to happiness!——But I cannot trust myself to speak of that now; my thoughts are whirling; my head aches: leave me, Richard; please leave me. I am not mad, but it seems more than I can bear to have you near me just now. It gives me the sense of the lines you quoted to me this evening:—

"Si vous n'avez rien à me dire,
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi?
Pourquoi me faire ce sourire?"

She murmured consideringly. "Oh how that air haunts me! Little heeded at the time, it comes back to me, as *words* sometimes will."

Richard gave her one supplicating, interrogating look, and then rushed away from her.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"No! not quite mad; but it would not take much at this moment to drive me so," muttered Grace, as she moved restlessly about her own room. "I almost wish I was mad. If I were a senseless maniac, my hair dressed out with straws, jabbering my meaningless words in a corner, pleased with my own foolish fantasy, it would be a happier fate than what I am enduring now. Let me reflect, let me reiterate every word I can recall, only to impress each severally on my memory. 'He loves her!' What need I to remember more? 'If he lost her, he would never know happiness again.' 'For *his* sake she must revive—open her eyes—live!' Oh, Richard! Richard!—falser than falseness! And I trusted you! I am glad my hand is burnt," she went on fiercely, abandoning herself, without attempt at control, to the uttermost strength of the paroxysm of heartfelt anguish sweeping over her soul. "I could almost replace it in the flames, when I think a short time since (poor fool!) how confidingly it rested in his. Oh, Richard! I thought you loved me honestly," she moaned

Digitized by Google

again, turning her face white with agony, her flashing, tearless eyes, up to heaven.

In this agitated condition Uda, on her arrival at Holford, found her cousin.

Grace coldly returned Miss Kirkland's embrace, checked her fervent expressions of admiration at her brave conduct and thankfulness for her escape, continuing her uncertain wandering about the apartment.

"Now I must go," she said, abruptly, at last. "I have promised to sit up with Mary to-night: I cannot rely upon the care of servants. You will not think me unkind, Uda, in leaving you; in anything I have said or done, I am hardly an accountable being at this moment: but it *is* a comfort to feel you are at hand, I assure you, however much my actions may seem to contradict my words."

"My dear, dear Grace, you must not, indeed, exert yourself further; you are quite worn out and feverish now. Lie down for awhile, and take a short rest, at all events; meanwhile I will supply your place by Miss Leigh: you may safely trust her to me."

"No one may usurp my place by her side, Uda."

"I do not singly proffer the request. I met Richard on my way hither, and he also entreated me to prevail on you to do no more to-night."

"I saved her life for him. The duty is plainly mine," she mused, abstractedly, suddenly standing still. "You are a good little thing, Uda," said Grace, bending down and kissing her brow.

Digitized by Google

Miss Kirkland watched her with anxiety.

"Before I go, just tie this bandage tighter for me—it has slipped. It is so awkward having only my left hand at liberty. Physical suffering will force itself into notice," she went on unconnectedly, as Uda obeyed her directions; "it has the merit of being the relentless overpowerer of mental pain: that is one advantage. Why do you look at me so seriously, Ermentrude?" ejaculated Grace, with rapidly gathering displeasure.

Tears rushed into Uda's eyes.

"You confuse me so, Grace. I wish to do all I can for you, and you turn my heart cold with your rugged words and unalterable indifference to my willing, if unavailing attempts to aid, comfort, sympathise with you, if necessary."

"Poor little Uda! I believe you love me," dreamily replied Miss Holford, stroking down her cousin's hair with her disengaged hand. "I am walking in darkness now, Uda—in darkness and perplexity," she resumed next moment; "and must grope out of the obscure tangle in which I am involved in my own apart, confused, weary way, before I am fit companion again for well-regulated minds, and people of human feelings. I would rather you did not ask me more."

"If the world goes hard with you, Grace, this strong repression of all kind, gentle sensibilities, this rigid exclusion of all others from participating in the cause of your suffering, will

Digitized by Google

only deepen misery. It is bad to shut one's self up, and maintain a mere defensive warfare in the citadel of Self, when assaulted by trial? Far better to meet it hand to hand, on an open field, supported by your friends."

Grace looked a little softened. "You must know it sooner or later." Then her whole mood altered. Seating herself on the ground, she threw her arm over Uda's knee, resting her head upon it. "To-day, as you well know, if it had not been for my uncle's death, was to have been my wedding-day," she continued, speaking in a childlike, trustful manner. "When that fearful scene had occurred below—when all danger was over, you would naturally have imagined that the first thought of him whose lot, but for a chance event, would have been indissolubly united to mine, would have been of me. Not so! Mary lay senseless on the ground; I, living, breathing, suffering. Richard Leigh knelt by *her* side—not mine. Richard Leigh, in heartfelt accents, poured forth wild expressions of love-worship to her; said, if she died life was valueless; called on her to recover for his sake; he was hers devotedly—hers only. I know not what rhapsodical nonsense in the course of a few moments he had not uttered; he was quite beside himself: I doubt now if he knows what actually occurred; but the truth was betrayed, and I the victim. My whole soul is in revolt against him!" she exclaimed, abruptly raising her head from its recumbent position; "no palliative can be found for such

Digitized by Google

despicable, unpardonable conduct. I am sorry for him, too, at times," she continued, nestling her head down again on her arm, with a tired sigh; he must have somewhat expiated his sin in the wretched life of deception he has been leading here for months. In what contempt must he not hold himself! and what punishment can equal the loss of self-respect?"

"I could not have given any man credit for behaving so dishonourably; I never heard any case parallel to this."

"Fifty, Uda—fifty, and more, of daily, hourly occurrence! Traitors abound on this earth; men, and women too, of far blacker dye than Richard Leigh. After all, perhaps he may have misled himself—who can say? The heart is desperately deceitful, we all know that by experience," added Grace, wearily. "I can blame him to the uttermost, hate him to myself; but when I speak of him to others it disarms me," she said, despondently, as if her sudden revulsion from censure to defence needed apology.

"Heaven support you, Grace; it is a trying position to be placed in. What shall you do? But I need not ask that; under such circumstances there can be but one course open for you."

"Marry him!" answered Grace, in a low, distinct voice.

"Never, Grace! to do so, would be quite impossible now."

"Yes; marry him!" repeated Miss Holford,

Digitized by Google

again lifting herself up; "he shall own the wealth he covets. My only attraction! The sole merit he can discover appertaining to me! He must, unfortunately, take Grace Holford with it — *the incumbrance!*" she exclaimed, disdainfully. "I dare say she will not be a burden to him long. Think of the last descendant of the Holfords throwing away hand and heart on a penniless adventurer! A pitiable spectacle, in truth! fitting result, that she should speedily hide her head in a quiet grave, that her race may not long have to blush for her weakness and unappreciation! I will not be thwarted, Uda, not even in word; as I say, so I shall act," exclaimed Grace, springing to her feet, and drawing her queenly figure proudly up to its full height, as Uda began to remonstrate. "Not one syllable will I heed," she said, defiantly, sweeping past Uda, and resuming her unquiet walk. Miss Kirkland followed her with wistful glances, not daring to interfere between her and the ungoverned passion mastering her better feelings.

"I should like," resumed Grace, after a while, in a stern, suppressed tone, again confronting her cousin; "I should dearly like to have all my possessions turned into gold, and given to Richard Leigh to gloat over; placed where he could handle it, play with it, showering it up and down, clasp it to his heart, fondly calling it his own! whilst for *my* portion, I would retain but one poor hovel, therein to place a humble couple who *loved* one another, that some

Digitized by Google

lingering belief in human faithfulness may remain to me. Thither, day after day, would I bend my steps, to feast my eyes in blessed contrast to my own loveless lot of desolate loneliness upon that dinner of herbs, which even the wisest of men to whom all earthly wealth and power belonged holds up for appreciation, *because* love accompanies it. Obligation is no tie to bind heart to heart; no sentiment of love or gratitude, as the bestower of wealth and position upon him, could ever unite Richard Leigh to me. He would simply grow to hate me, as the barrier between him and the one he really loved. I will bequeath him my wealth and die! I wish I *was* dead—dead, buried, and forgotten!" she said, despondently, sinking down on her knees by Uda's side, a distressed, frowning look upon her face, fixing her glittering eyes with a straining, staring gaze, on the farthest corner of the apartment.

"Grace," gently whispered Uda, passing her arm tenderly round her, as she knelt there stiff and unbending, "would you be so very kind, would you mind very much to say after me the words of the prayer you have often told me it was your habit to use night and morning when you were a little child?—'God bless Grace, and make her a good child, humble, kind, and meek, like His dear Son, loving and forgiving to every one, through Jesus Christ our Lord,'" repeated Uda, prompting her.

Grace cast a miserable, puzzled look on Ermentrude; her lips trembled, her countenance

Digitized by Google

worked agitatedly with contending feelings, and she burst into a passion of tears.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Uda, as Grace wept on, more calmly than at the first unloosing of the floodgates of her grief; "those tears have saved her reason;" and soothingly bending over her, she silently prayed that submission and strength, patiently to endure, might be given to the weeping, unhappy girl.



Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

MOURNFULLY the time passed on—gladness of heart was dimmed at Holford Manor; and there was little in surrounding influences to dispel the darkness: events seemed to run in unison with feelings.

For some time little hopes were entertained of Mary's recovery; low fever supervened. Sorrow had been busy at her heart for long, sapping her strength, corroding her energies: the baneful effects told now, in the impaired force she possessed to meet the evil consequences of her accident.

In childhood she and Richard Leigh had been constant playfellows and companions; her attachment for him had grown upwards with her years, to end in disappointment. He used in those days to call her his little wife, as children will; and once, in after years, had ambiguously implied the childish promise was expected to be ratified. It was no tangible hope to build on; the words were so arranged, they might have stood for jest or earnest. Yet Mary cherished them in her heart; though at the time, in the same spirit of idle talking, she had laughingly refused his proposition. In generous un-

Digitized by Google

selfishness she would allow no promise to her to fetter his prospects.

It was her fond expectation that he would win a name in the world; with the blindness of a loving heart she greatly overrated his capabilities, which, if sinuous and brilliant, needed depth to make their owner a leading man. He had, undoubtedly, good abilities, and was very agreeable, but resembled strongly the monkey who showed off the magic lantern in Florian's fable. Like the praiseworthy animal in question he could talk fluently, whether on "le soleil et toute sa gloire, la lune, ou l'histoire d'Adam, d'Eve, des animaux, et la naissance du monde;" only, unfortunately, at the end of all this pyrotechnic display of talent, the bystanders were invariably left as wise as they were at the beginning.

"Il n'avait oublié qu'un point,
C'était d'éclairer sa lanterne!"

At first, Richard had felt greatly annoyed at Mary's decision; for, with his vague, dubious words, he had actually been feeling his way with serious intentions. He was grateful afterwards that her prudent caution had saved him from the miseries of an improvident marriage.

All his life Richard had trifled with both time and opportunity. He had the misfortune —so long as he should rest content to live for self alone—to possess sufficient income to be independent of work. He had, in his day, embarked in several professions, but tired of all in succession. He was one of those restless mor-

Digitized by Google

tals who seem doomed to flit about the world, having, apparently, no domestic claims belonging to them, no hearth they can call their own. He knew everybody, was seen everywhere, yet no one was aware who he was, or what spot on earth he dignified by the name of home. Three quarters of the year he wandered from one country-house to another, making Groton Hall (Mr. Kirkland's place) or Holford Manor his head-quarters; from May to August only he lived on his own resources in the whirl of London life. A wasted existence was Richard Leigh's. He was not exactly a bad man, nor a thoroughly unprincipled one; but a man of exorbitant desires, extravagant tastes, and selfish aims.

In all his chequered career he had never been so perplexingly situated, or, to use his own phraseology, "found himself in so awkward a fix," as he was plunged in now.

Since the night of the fire he and Grace had seen but little of one another. She shut herself up in the sick-room, and made a most untiring and devoted nurse to Mary. She showed no jealousy towards her, seemed to bear no ill-will against her innocent rival; all her ancient prejudices appeared absorbed in interest for the poor suffering being she had rescued from the jaws of death, and who was now dependent on her care.

In the eyes of the world she and Richard were still unchangeably betrothed lovers; with the exception of Uda, no one being aware what an iron bar of severance had been raised between dividing their hearts widely apart.

Digitized by Google

Richard was sadly altered of late; he looked haggard and worried; there was a downcast, humbled appearance about him, when in Grace's presence, pitiable to witness in any man. Conscience, and the few words they had exchanged on that fatal evening, told him he had betrayed himself to her; yet he had but a faint idea how, or to what extent. The events of that time rested in his memory as might an unjoining troubled dream. And Grace went on her own haughty, impervious way, making no allusion to what had occurred, seeking no explanation, never upbraiding him, but trampling down at every turn his self-respect and vanity. Richard chafed at his subjection, but lacked courage to cast it off. In her presence he felt and stood a mute, unresisting captive. She was revenging herself for his former domineering rule over her individuality; in her turn, now she swayed his independence of action at will, closed his lips from utterance, and his spirit from understanding.

Youth finally triumphed; and Mary was, at length, pronounced to be convalescent. No sooner was she actually said to be out of danger, than Richard left Holford for London. It was an easy mode of escape from the difficulties of his position. Moreover, Mary had ceased to charm him as entirely as she had done heretofore. His selfish nature was in rebellion against her, as the unintentional cause of his perplexed condition, the impediment in the prosperity of his career. By the force of egotistical resentment, love was "bidding fair, rapidly to pass

Digitized by Google

into aversion;" anyway, Mary had already become a half-antipathy.

She was quite aware the tide was setting against her. A little more toiling in rowing counter to the stream of her inclinations lay before her; yet she tried to rejoice it should be so, since it increased his prospects of felicity.

During these many intervening weeks other changes had occurred. Uda was now established at Groton Hall, installed as head of her uncle's house. She made the best of her new life, but found it by no means congenial.

Basil had returned to Brereton. Mrs. Sherburne was at the seaside; and to the sea Mrs. Leigh was anxious to take Mary, as soon as her strength was sufficiently recruited to enable her to travel.

For Grace's accommodation, Sybil had good-naturedly stayed on at Grantham; but, now that no reason existed for further delay, she frequently expressed a wish that an early day might be named for their removal to Brereton.

For once in life Grace was wearisome to excess with indecision. She dreaded the arrival of the time for departure from Grantham; feeling that, with it, some definite result must take place with regard to her situation. Yet, when once in a letter Uda ventured to inquire what line of conduct Grace intended to pursue, Miss Holford laconically replied, and that in a postscript:—

"I shall for the present leave things as they are. Eventually, it is my intention to act; but

Digitized by Google

I mean to take my time about it. If you love me, Uda, never refer to this subject again. I can both stand and endure better alone."

But it is far easier for any of us to say, "I will take my time," than really to do so in this world of conflicting interests and overruling circumstances.

Richard, gaining confidence in absence, wrote pressingly for some positive period to be fixed upon for their marriage. Sybil, her patience exhausted, equally urged a decision. Basil was growing eager to have her at Brereton: she as anxious to be with him. Grace must make up her mind whether her wedding should take place from thence or from Grantham.

"Yes, I will marry him," mused Grace, as she reperused his letter. "I am tired of suspense and conflict. He must inevitably suffer in the eyes of the world should I break off the engagement on the true grounds; and that would only drive him from bad to worse. I am not sufficiently brave-hearted or generous-minded to take the blame of fickleness on myself. Yes, I will marry him," she repeated, with lips firmly set. "I shall do so, fully conscious of the risk at which I stake my chance of happiness. Life, at the best, is but of brief lasting!"

And self-willed, misguided Grace, followed out the wild, sacrificing promptings of her own romantic heart, and a second time really fixed her wedding-day.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"You look fagged and out of spirits, Grace; come into the garden for a stroll with me, it will do you good this sweet summer's evening," said Richard, on their wedding-eve.

At sound of his voice Miss Holford started from the abstracted reverie in which she had been absorbed, and looked up; her beautiful face was cold and feelingless as statuary marble. A cold shiver crept over her frame,—she hesitated a moment, then listlessly prepared to obey.

"The air is so mild, you will need no thicker shawl than this," continued he, taking up a lace mantilla from a neighbouring chair. Grace carelessly threw it over her head.

She had never looked more exquisitely lovely than under the shadow of that black mantilla. Yet the expression of her face was sadness that ill became the bride of to-morrow.

They passed out into the verandah; her mien was calm but unbending, her step unelastic. Richard walked by her side, glancing at her with concern depicted on his countenance. So together, but silent, for some time they wandered on through the pretty grounds of Grantham.

Digitized by Google

"We are not happy," said Grace, nervously, at last; "there is fear and hesitation in both our minds: we should mutually find it a relief if we put our thoughts into words. I have felt all day it was my duty to seek this interview," she continued, in a low, faltering voice, for he made no reply—"yet, against conscience, have done my best to raise obstacles to avoid it. Right actions are often forced upon us against our will, and this walk of your seeking compels me to act as I ought voluntarily to have done."

Richard coloured up crimson. "Having by your own showing, Grace, been deferred so long, would not the subject of your confidence wait until to-morrow? I feel little disposed for grave discussions to-night;" and hurriedly he called her attention to some arrangements for the coming day.

Grace listened and answered,—"In our walk to Oakley Dell we promised there should be no concealments between us;" directly afterwards she resumed—"On the strength of that promise I ask you to listen to me now."

"Be it so," he said, tearing a long branch of roses from a tree as he passed by, and beginning to pluck it to pieces in order to conceal, as best he could, his gathering agitation.

"Supported by pride and stormy passions, mingled, perhaps, with some little kindness for you, from day to day I have weakly gone on, without seeking an explanation," proceeded Grace, in a firmer voice. "On the verge of taking the solemn vow we shall mutually plight

Digitized by Google

to-morrow, I have suddenly awakened to the full consciousness of my error. I cannot become your wife with suspicion and concealment on my soul. Had I unflinchingly done what was right, long ago I should have dissolved our engagement."

"Are you considerately preparing me for that event now?" he asked, masking his confusion under the semblance of a freezing indifference.

"It is too late for that," she said, subduedly. "*Too late!* You and I must now together meet life's trials and quicksands as best we can. Only I wish you to know, if I could but gather courage to say it, that I marry you, aware that I do not hold the first place in your heart, conscious that all your protestations to the contrary were counterfeit: this assurance will somewhat mitigate the falseness of the grave, awful words you must speak before God and man to-morrow."

"Are you so very sure it is as you would imply?" he asked quickly, regarding her with an anxious gaze.

"Heaven's terrible denunciation against the perjured has been haunting me all day long!" exclaimed Miss Holford, wildly — "the curse against they that swear falsely. Do you remember it?" she went on, in hushed, solemn tones;—"That it shall 'remain in the midst of their house and consume it, with the timber thereof and the stones!' I tremble to begin our married life with perfidy and untruth, lest that fearful judgment should pursue us."

"Again I ask you, Grace, are you so very

Digitized by Google

positive that my heart's dearest love is not given now to you alone?"

"You evade my questions. Oh, Richard! do not try to deceive me longer!" she answered, sorrowfully. "I heard the frantic words you uttered when Mary lay, as you believed, lifeless at your feet. No longer master of yourself, you betrayed your feelings too surely then. Those words were sterling with truth, and are not easily erased from my mind. Alas! Memory ever writes proof-full truths in indelible ink upon the tablets of the heart."

"I will not yield to you! Hear me, Grace. With deep contrition I own to having *once* bitterly wronged you. I frankly confess, when I first wooed you for my wife, I dissembled with you in expressing a love to an extent which I did not feel. Yet, at the same time, a secret, uncontrollable impulse, ever drew me towards you. You always had my warmest admiration—a more than common interest—my esteem. If another possessed my heart, I was willing then to sacrifice that love to interest."

"And believed that I *could* be blind to the truth, that, even if chance had not revealed it, I should have lived on without discovering the difference between cold ingratitude and heart devotion? Oh, how dared you bring down your nature so low as to barter your integrity for the world?" interrupted Grace, disdainfully.

Digitized by Google

"A strange revulsion has taken place in my feelings since then, Grace," he said, with gravity. "I am no longer a slave to the passion that once ruled me. Maybe, I have loved out my love; it is quite possible to do so. Anyway, it has shrivelled into nothingness. If *you* have suffered during these trying months of suspense and restlessness, think what my meed of endurance has been, with self-condemnation and remorse added to the hindrances that beset our path. How the change in my feelings was worked I cannot say. I have mourned and repented. Daily I feel my attachment for you strengthening. I have long pined to tell you this, but lacked resolve to break the ice between us. Try me, Grace, with a fearless trust that I shall never again shadow your young life by my unworthy conduct; believe me when I say, it shall be my one endeavour to atone by my devotion in the future for the sorrows of the past. I come to you a penitent man. Do not cast me off; but, hand in hand, let us calmly accept a common fate and renew a broken confidence."

Humbly he pleaded. Grace's eyes were moist with unbidden tears. Grace's proud face was subdued and calm. Her sanguine heart, ever ready to leap at hasty conclusions, at once beat strong in reassurance.

"I am glad we have had this conversation," she said, when presently they reached the house. "The promise of a bright life is dawning for us; such as would never have been the case had

Digitized by Google

I checked my impulse to be sincere. I can tranquilly now meet to-morrow, and in all trust and confidence pledge you my troth."

"Receiving mine in return with equal confidence, Grace?" said Richard, playfully.

"My nature is, fortunately, very hopeful," answered Miss Holford, laughing. "Do not look annoyed at my foolish words. We are neither of us models, yet neither irredeemable. I can say no more than that I am content to entrust my happiness to your hands. We have a lifetime to spend together; and must instruct and guide one another, fearlessly meeting whatever it may please God to send us."

Half an hour later, Richard's dog-cart was standing at the door to convey him back to Holford.

It was such a lovely, quiet summer's night, that even Richard Leigh, though not generally addicted to expend notice on such things, was irresistibly struck with the pleasant influence of the scene, and arrested his steps to gaze awhile at the peaceful, simple landscape visible from the doorway at Grantham.

The flower-garden lay bathed in moonlight; a gentle breeze just moved the trees; the large acacia on the lawn threw a flickering shadow over the grass. It was one of those rare nights which are all-satisfying in themselves, and seem only made to be enjoyed.

The lights streamed from the drawing-room windows on the gravel-walk. Uda was playing

Digitized by Google

some valses, and the music floated softly and winningly on the air; Grace was leaning over the verandah rails, watching his departure.

He kissed his hand to her as he passed by, and she smiled back her adieux. He felt unusually regretful at leaving her. He drove rapidly on. His spirits were excited; his mind was in a tumult, from the contending emotions called forth by their recent conversation.

With that wondrous intuitive perception and complete sympathy horses in such an extraordinary manner appear to possess, with the temporary mood of their masters, his steed seemed to divine the spirit actuating its driver, and dashed on at a reckless pace, much to the discomfiture of the smart-looking groom by Mr. Leigh's side, who, for all his immovable face and the sedate pose of his folded arms, was inwardly quaking at his master's unsteady coachmanship.

It was an awkward, tortuous road, full of strange twists and unhandy turnings. In one place a level crossing, belonging to the line of railway which passed through the village of Holford, intersected it. A peculiarly abrupt bend preceded this spot, close to which stood the station-house.

As Richard came in sight of it, to his annoyance he saw the gates were being closed for the arrival of a down-train, which the next moment came into the station. This was the more provoking, for, being a single line, he was well aware that his detention must continue until the arrival

Digitized by Google

of the up-train, of which, at present, there was no visible symptom. There was not any help for it, and he pulled up.

His horse, a powerful half-broken-in animal (Richard was addicted to risking his neck with the like), however, manifested a peculiar dislike to standing still. It fidgeted impatiently, pawed the ground, and, finally, began violently to plunge.

"Shall I go to his head, sir?" inquired the groom.

"Certainly not; it is a nasty trick he has got, he never can stand still at gate or door—he must be broken of it."

Richard mastered his horse, and then, tired of attending to it, was soon lost again in his former train of half-melancholy reflections. As Grace had observed, "a happy life seemed dawning for them." Richard recalled her words, and as he looked up at the calm serenity of the cloudless sky, as he considered the stars which here and there were gemming the firmament of heaven, thoughts came into his mind which had found no place there before, since he had been a boy. —Good thoughts, and an awakening love for God.

The restive horse had been quieted for the instant; and forgetting its former delinquencies, absent in spirit there its master sat, with loose reins held in careless hands.

A sudden snort from the engine at this period startled the animal afresh; he pricked his ears, gave a frightened toss with his head, then made a wild plunge forward in the direction of the railway gates, to which, impatient to

Digitized by Google

pass through as soon as they were reopened, Mr. Leigh had advanced his vehicle in dangerous proximity.

Awakened from his reverie, yet scarcely aware what was occurring, Richard tightly jerked up the reins, checking the animal so abruptly as almost to throw him back upon the dog-cart. This settled the matter—the horse strove to rear, and foiled, gathering up all its perverse strength, again with stronger effort made a rush for the gates; it came full against them: carelessly secured, the imperfect fastenings at once gave way beneath the overwhelming force bearing upon them. In another instant gates and horse were under the guard's van, the dog-cart smashed to atoms, and both its occupants thrown out!

A scene of general confusion ensued; women screamed, faces peered from every carriage along the line; whilst the bystanders, with one accord, crowded to the spot.

The poor horse was a piteous spectacle to behold. It had been hurt in the lungs, and was bleeding profusely—a long flap of skin hanging down from his chest.

The groom quickly regained his feet. He had, fortunately, escaped all severer injury than a few bruises. Mr. Leigh, who at first had appeared stunned by his fall, now slowly also rose. In a perplexed, devious manner, he began to walk across the line. Some afterwards said that, as he did so, they had noticed how several times he had confusedly raised his hand to the back of his head, staring uncertainly

Digitized by Google

about him. Before he had proceeded many steps, again he fell. The bystanders rushed to his assistance. They lifted him up; he yet breathed, but never spoke again. Before the night was spent, Richard Leigh was a lifeless corpse!



Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXX.

A YEAR and a half had gone by since the date of the events narrated in the last chapter. During that period, Grace had never again revisited Holford; she could not bear the idea of daily mingling in familiar scenes, gloomed over by so many painful recollections; where the mournful tragedy had occurred, which left her bereaved and lonely in the springtime of her youth; where to-day and to-morrow were ever saddened by the reflected shadow of yesterday.

She had attained her majority in the interval: it became necessary, in some measure, to celebrate the event; her presence was absolutely required; nothing was left for her but to conquer her repugnance and go there. No one ever knew how much the effort cost her; but she made it, and though the suffering within was sharp, got through the trial better than she had dared to hope for—as is generally the case when a dreaded necessity has unavoidably to be encountered.

Her sad story had invested her with a melancholy interest in the eyes of the world; and, coupled with her beauty and wealth, made her a

Digitized by Google

marked object of attention wherever she went. In consequence, she seemed to have imbibed a certain disinclination for society, and it was as difficult now to induce her to mingle in its ranks, as formerly it had been to restrain a passion for gaiety, which threatened to degenerate into frivolity—she never appeared to care for leaving home now.

Yet, excepting in this respect, Grace was scarcely altered—grown a little graver and quieter, perhaps—a degree tamed down; but the same sanguine, high spirit was there; the same impetuous disposition and own-opinionated nature: in salient points, characters rarely, if ever, decidedly change.

Miss Holford had insisted on restricting the festivities to the tenantry and poor of her estate, and for the occasion had contented herself with simply assembling round her the old circle of time-tried friends. The rejoicings over, they were passing a few quiet days together before going their respective ways.

Grace was about to take possession of the Manor, though she predicted it would be a very nominal occupation.

It so happened one afternoon that the whole party had walked over there, to pass opinion on some projected alterations. These having been severally discussed in all their bearings, whilst the others were rambling over the old house, Uda had gone to visit a former favourite cottager, and was returning up the avenue at the very moment that John Vaughan made his ap-

Digitized by Google

pearance at the hall door. He at once advanced to meet her.

"Like yourself," he said, as he joined her. "I grew so weary of contemplating those innumerable desolate-looking rooms, I have made my escape into the fresh air, and find the bright sunshine an agreeable contrast."

"The Manor in its present state is not an enlivening contemplation."

"It is worse than unenlivening—it is downright heartaching work to see that poor young creature going about with her patient, attentive manner, trying to be interested in everything; so calm and business-like in outward seeming, yet unconsciously betraying by little words and actions the sorrow folded within."

"I do not believe she ever for one instant forgets her dead—coldness settled so suddenly upon her life, it made her trial doubly hard to bear," said Uda, sympathetically.

A somewhat prolonged silence ensued.

"Feeling I could be of no use to her was, I believe, the true cause that drove me away just now," resumed Miss Kirkland, presently. "There was something so inexpressibly touching in seeing her making her solitary preparations for going to the home they were to have shared together."

"Will you walk on, then, instead of returning to the house?"

Uda at once assented, and side by side they paced up and down the approach. They had often met before then since the eventful night of

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Leigh's ball; and all awkwardness and restraint had long since passed away from between them. They appeared tacitly to have agreed to ignore that one painful episode in their past lives, and quietly to have resumed their ancient friendship. They talked on freely as they went along, chiefly of Grace.

"Will she always be so wedded to his memory, and mourn him thus, think you, Uda?" asked John, after a pause, at last.

"She is heart-stricken now; but hearts are very like plants—if they have once been trained to cling round a supporting object, they are apt to crave for the loving support again. It seems hard to say so, but, knowing more of their past relationship than any one else, I hazard to you the opinion, that death bound Richard Leigh more thoroughly to Grace than ever life could have done; in the dreadful shock the awfully sudden manner of his decease was to her, the remembrance of his failings was swallowed up, and she only dwells upon his loveable qualities. It was a fearful mode of severance; but I doubt, if she had married him, that Grace would ever have been a really happy woman."

"Uda, do you believe it possible, when, year after year, you have been faithfully attached to one person, that all at once you may be awakened to the consciousness that a shadow of turning has taken sudden possession of your feelings?" hastily asked John, in some perplexity.

"One hears of so many parallel instances,

Digitized by Google

I suppose it may be so, though I doubt such a dawning of fresh liking ever coming *suddenly;* the preparation must have been at work for some time previously in the heart, a chance touch merely completing its permanent accomplishment."

"Such a discovery amazingly shakes self-trust," he said, ponderingly.

"Pardon the question, but are you alluding to personal experience?"

"I fancy so."

"What a jesuitical reply! In your case, why need distrust result from a new bent of feeling? for you wish me, I presume, to interpret your ambiguous words into the plain English, that you have followed my advice, and ceased to think of me as the object of your strongest attachment. I put it plainly, for truth is best at every cost."

"If it were so, would you despise me very greatly?"

"On the contrary, I should unspeakably rejoice, always providing that the old bond of friendship between us remained intact."

"That could never falter. I suppose it *may* be as I have hinted; yet, after seven years of untiring devotion, it seems a mystery how such a change could ever arise in a heart," said John, with no little embarrassment.

"What human feeling *could* stand the brunt of perpetual discouragement? Have I not done my best to crush down a true affection, knowing it could never be reciprocated? Love rarely can

Digitized by Google

support itself in existence for long where it finds a paucity of hope to feed upon, even though it may have entered in with full intention of abiding, where it dies out, for evermore."

"It has often puzzled me why people are brought near us whom we *can* love, and do learn to love, yet who never are to be ours; or, as in Miss Holford's case, ours only for a little space; since, after suffering much for them, we are to lose them in the end."

"First, as a trial of our faith: we must not withhold the sacrifice of our dearest, if it be required of us; and next, to fulfil some part in our mental development, which, when accomplished, the agent is taken from us. I will not press your confidence, but if only I dared hope it was Grace who had supplanted me, my satisfaction would be complete."

"I am very much interested in her."

"That will do for the present," interrupted Uda; "interest is an admirable foundation to build upon. I will merely add one little bit of advice,—cultivate the feeling and persevere; it is the wisest thing you can do: you may believe I would not lightly say so."

And all this time Basil was standing in the projecting window of one of the upper rooms, with a sinking heart watching the pair holding such earnest conversation!

"Many a long day has gone by since you and I were in this room, Basil," observed Sybil, approaching him. "You must remem-

Digitized by Google

ber it well in former times as Mrs. Holford's boudoir."

"Like ourselves, it is somewhat altered since those days, Sybil. Poor Mrs. Leigh's gaudy taste does not exactly accord with Mrs. Holford's refined arrangement. Does it not seem strange for us to be wandering at will over this old house? It is very pleasant to revisit all the favourite resorts of a happy childhood. Do you not think so?"

"I suppose it might be to a woman—it is so completely their way to grasp the unsatisfactory shadows of what they have once held in substance; as far as I am capable of judging, they seem to possess in common a wondrous mania for hugging to their heart whatever tends to make them miserable. To me it is dreariness itself being here," answered Basil, somewhat crabbedly.

"You saw Ermentrude Sherburne yesterday—how did you think her looking?" inquired Sybil, with interest.

"Very far from well; her wanderings do not appear to have done her any good. There, again, is an instance of a woman holding fast to a wretched Past! She and her husband were for years miserable together, yet no sooner has she lost him but she must go out of her way to make a pilgrimage to the spot where he died, as if he had become to her heart a canonised martyr!"

"She believed it to be her duty to go there, and with that impression every one must respect

Digitized by Google

her act. Are you aware, Basil, that the better part of two years have gone by since the news came of Mr. Sherburne's death?"

"What of that?"

"Nay, it is not for me to answer that question, if your own heart does not respond to it."

"I really am totally at a loss to understand your drift, Sybil."

"That I regret, since Ermentrude's pale looks may possibly have much to do with your stolid determination not to comprehend my meaning," said Sybil, suggestively.

Basil did not answer her: he had resumed his contemplation of John and Uda. "I suppose it must be the inevitable result," he murmured, absently, with a heavy sigh, abruptly turning his back to the window.

"Of course it must!" exclaimed Sybil; "decidedly Ermentrude has borne much: but perhaps the present state of suspense in which you let her linger may be more trying than many a more visible trial."

"That *I* let her linger in!" cried Basil, amazed, and starting into consciousness. "No two people, I should say, could cross one another's paths less than Mrs. Sherburne and I."

"At this moment, yes; but how frequently you have been unexpectedly brought together! how strangely your lives have commingled! and now it seems to me as if they were fated to flow on together for evermore."

Digitized by Google

"That they never will again. If such be your aim, make your mind easy about it."

"I suppose the words escaped you unawares when you admitted just now—'It must be the inevitable result,'" observed Sybil, looking significantly at her brother. "It is a pity to nourish pride until it becomes a barrier to happiness."

"We were talking at cross-purposes then, I fancy," he said, smiling. "Pride is not the barrier to my happiness—I wish it was; it would be easier to conquer," he added, with abrupt seriousness, turning another rueful gaze at the pair visible through the window.

"If only you would not shut yourself up in this close armour of reserve!" exclaimed Sybil, with impatience; "but if you really will not be open with me, at the risk of offending you I must with you. Basil, you *shall* hear me, though I feel I am in a measure acting unfairly by Ermentrude in betraying her feelings. You are mutually attached, I am convinced of it; and at the same time are doing all you can to make one another miserable. You have given her every encouragement, in allowing her to consult you, in volunteering advice on several points——"

"In the laying out of a flower-garden, or the cutting down a tree in the shrubbery! Pshaw! Sybil: a sensible woman like you should not build upon such shallow basis!"

"You might well afford to forgive her now," persisted Sybil; "for if ever a broken vow was ənted in sackcloth and ashes, it has been done

Digitized by Google

by Ermentrude Sherburne. Fate has at last set her free. Surely it becomes a duty for you to atone for the Past to her?"

"What *Past?* It must, indeed, be singular compensation that would fairly repay Mrs. Sherburne for blighting my youth, saddening the best years of my life, and cankering my nature! Yet, in the face of all this, in maturer age you would have me give her a hand without a heart; still sacrificing myself to delude her into the idea that by accepting me she is atoning for former injuries!"

"Then you have no intention of marrying Ermentrude?"

"Certainly not!"

"I am very sorry to hear it."

"And why?"

"Because I believe her to be deeply attached to you."

"Did she ever tell you so?"

"No, or I should never have begun this conversation; but I feel as convinced of the fact as if she *had* told me; and repeat, that I consider you have given her every reason to believe you wish to marry her, and that she is breaking her heart for you."

"Strong accusations!" cried Basil, snatching another glance through the window. "How well Uda is looking! Groton air seems to agree with her."

"She appears to be happier there, poor child, than she used to be; but I do not suppose Mr. Kirkland will keep her long."

Digitized by Google

"Why not?" he inquired, with hasty anxiety.

"Because I fancy she is growing wise, and beginning to appreciate the worth of such a heart as John Vaughan's. It has always been my wish that she should marry him."

"Why, Sybil, what a horrid matchmaker you are becoming in your old age!"

"Only for one or two whom I care for. I cannot trouble myself about the generality of the world; but, as regards Uda, I really have hopes of seeing my wish accomplished now. Notice how happy she looks, as he is speaking to her."

"Persevere!" they heard Uda's clear voice saying, as she passed under the window. "You may believe I would not lightly say so."

"Do you hear that?" cried Sybil, joyfully.

"Every word of it; and as they seem so comfortably to have settled the matter to the satisfaction of all parties, suppose we go down and join them, answered Mr. Rutherford, with provoking impenetrability.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXXI.

Basil dwelt in cloudland for the remainder of the evening; and such a worn, thoughtful face made its appearance at breakfast the following morning, the companion of a mind, if possible, more absent than that of overnight, that Sybil began to tremble for the effects of her own words, and more than ever was inclined to appreciate the invaluable talent of silence.

After wasting half the morning in discursive wanderings amongst the shrubs and trees, only varying the amusement by disconsolately watching Uda feeding the tame ducks on the garden pool, on a sudden impulse of thought Basil went in search of his sister—he came across her in the hall.

"One moment please, Sybil," he said, gently detaining her. "Look here, I have not the slightest wish to renew at length the conversation we held together yesterday. I only require you to answer me one plain question. Are you firmly convinced that all you then said about Mrs. Sherburne is incontrovertible fact?"

Digitized by Google

"I can only tell you that I gave utterance to my own decided convictions."

"Remember, I am asking you no light question."

"Aware that such is the case, I still unhesitatingly reply the same, in the firm belief that Ermentrude Sherburne is deeply attached to you, and that I am speaking under no confused judgment when I further add, she looks to you for what remnant of happiness may be hers in the future."

"Thank you for a straightforward answer; your words sank low down into my heart yesterday. I should, indeed, be miserable if, from any interpretation of word or deed of mine, even if mistaken, any woman should ever have to say that *I* trifled with her feelings; let alone one for whom I entertain so deep a sentiment of regard as I possess for Ermentrude Sherburne. It is my intention to solve the doubt of my position without delay, Sybil."

Her eyes filled with tears, though she could not tell the reason, as with a warm grasp of the hand Basil left her. Within the hour he was on his road to Ellchurch.

His firm-set face haunted Sybil all day; but as in the course of the afternoon the three ladies, escorted by John Vaughan, were walking in the village, they met Mr. Rutherford returning home, again in very changed mood; exceeding happiness the expression of his countenance, a heart-felt fulness of joy existing within, clearly discernible in every look and movement.

Digitized by Google

"What, back already!" exclaimed Sybil as he rode up to them. "I did not expect you home so speedily."

"Better if I had come sooner; better still, if I had never gone at all. I have to thank you for sending me on a nice scatter-brained errand, Miss Rutherford," he answered, laughing, lowering his voice, so that no one else could hear him.

"You do not really mean to say so!" And Sybil's face expressed her full astonishment, if words failed her.

"Even so; for the future, remember, I judge for myself. I gave you credit for possessing more penetration, Sybil. But I will not scold you; your delusion has opened a bright prospect before me in another way, I can well afford to forgive the dilemma into which you plunged me;" and, with an aggravating nod for her special benefit, Basil directed his conversation to the party at large.

Spite of his protestations against shortening their walk, they all insisted on turning back and accompanying him home. Long before they reached Grantham he and Uda had, somehow, got separated, and in advance of the rest of the group.

"Do you know where I have been to-day?" he suddenly asked her, as she walked by the side of his horse.

"No. Aunt Sybil was profoundly mysterious about your destination."

"You do not say so? Poor, dear Sybil!

Digitized by Google

what a deal of trouble she has been taking about nothing at all lately! I have been to Ellchurch, Uda; benevolently giving you the chance of calling me 'uncle.' How do you like the prospect of such a new relationship between us?"

"I must first know if for the future I really have to accept it," she said, with ill-concealed uneasiness.

"Set your mind at rest on that point. I have been exceedingly hardly treated, Uda."

"You do not look very miserable in consequence, anyhow. I wish I could make out whether you are in jest or earnest, Mr. Rutherford."

"Do I not bear all the appearance of a hopelessly rejected man about me?"

"If being in unusual good spirits is any criterion, certainly."

"Sometimes 'No' sounds sweeter than 'YES,' Uda; have you not learnt that yet in your experience? When we strain a point of high-flown duty too far, it is truly agreeable to witness it crack in pieces beneath the tension, and be able to dispense with the consequences. It was all Sybil's fault: she has begun too late in life to meddle with such things, and her perceptions are not very clear on the subject," he laughingly rambled on.

"You completely baffle my comprehension at this moment."

"So your aunt did mine. Retaliation is comforting. Have you heard the latest intentions of Mrs. Sherburne?"

Digitized by Google

"No."

"She mentioned having named an enthusiastic project—which I am convinced she will never carry out—to Sybil. I fancied Sybil told you everything. In imitation of Miss Leigh, she wishes to enter a Protestant sisterhood. Did you ever hear such a preposterous idea?"

"What, then, is to become of Ellchurch?"

"Ellchurch is to be relinquished to the next heir; some distant relation of the Sherburnes, to whom in due course of succession her husband bequeathed it. A needy man, as I understand, with a large family, certain to snatch at the chance. 'A sensible, wise-headed person, who would do far more justice to the place than ever it would lie in her power to bestow on it,' Mrs. Sherburne calmly told me."

"In her case it appears to me a mistaken scheme. The lot appointed us by Providence must surely be the best for us to fulfil; and where He has given us distinct social duties, I consider it must be wrong to desert them for others of our own selecting."

"That was my argument; but Mrs. Sherburne persists in considering herself an isolated being, with no ties in life, no claims of kindred to require her care. Had not Mr. Kirkland forestalled her design, she had intended that you should reside with her; that pleasant arrangement being impracticable, she regards herself free to follow the bent of her own wishes, and expects to find in her new condition of existence that interest and satisfaction which



Digitized by Google

elsewhere in this world seems denied her. The Holfords always delighted in extremes, and will do so to the end of all things."

"Such retreats, no doubt, are valuable comforts to some. To Mary Leigh, for instance, the vocation of a Sister of Mercy was admirably suitable. She was, indeed, lonely in the world. Her earthly happiness had been stricken down by the hand of her dearest friend—the possessor of one of those rare, intense natures, who, having loved once, can never love again, Mary could never have transferred her love to another; to my thinking, *she* chose a wise and holy part. To my poor judgment, Mary did well; but with Aunt Ermentrude it is very different. Still, it is a point on which no one can decide for another. At her age she must be capable of determining whether, for a continuance, her soul could bear a life of self-sacrifice, perpetual hardships, and privations. If she is so very lonely in spirit, (God pity her, poor dear, if she be so!) if she finds the duties of her position insufficient to fill the void, maybe having some distinct routine of specified work would remove a heavy weight from her heart, and in tending the suffering, comforting the miserable, in the world-wide kindredship of souls, she may discover healing balm for her own sorrows; in largely bestowing, receive the sympathy she craves for. Where we neglect no distinctly ordained demands laid upon us to follow our own self-chosen calling, what life that we could lead would be as acceptable to God

Digitized by Google

as to devote ourselves to His service and do His work? Yet I can scarcely fancy a sisterhood suiting Aunt Ermentrude; perhaps, on consideration, she may become more sensible to the wisdom of your advice."

"I fear, my only success was to determine her more resolutely upon taking the irrevocable step. She would not listen to me for an instant; though she made me, perforce, listen to her! She read my heart through and through, Uda. I left her a wiser and a happier man than I was this morning," he said, trying to catch her eye.

"A satisfactory result, at all events, to a visit: that may account for your merry looks."

"Though, to my pleadings, I did not receive the same encouragement to '*persevere*' Vaughan was lucky enough to get from a young lady yesterday. 'A word not lightly spoken,' either, Uda!"

"What! you condescend to turn listener, Mr. Rutherford?" she said, colouring crimson.

"If young ladies *will* raise their voices as they pass beneath open windows, and their conversation is accidentally overheard, it can scarcely be called *listening*," remarked Basil, taking off his hat, and passing his hand over his forehead.

"You merely caught up a word. John, I am happy to say, is growing a sensible man, and no longer cares, as he once did, for Uda Kirkland," she replied the next moment, with nervous hesitation.

Digitized by Google

"I am truly rejoiced to hear it," exultingly exclaimed Basil.

They had now reached the entrance-gate. Uda opened it, and was holding it back for him to pass by; when, to her astonishment, suddenly urging on his horse, Basil dashed swiftly through it, and up the drive, without one word of apology!

"What on earth have you been saying or doing, Uda, to send that grave character scouring over the country at a break-neck pace, in such an unwonted state of excitement?" wonderingly asked John Vaughan, as the rest of the party came up to her.

"You know very nearly as much about it as I do; my impression is, that he has suddenly taken leave of his senses," answered Uda, half amused, half startled.

"Mad as a March hare!" observed Sybil, with vexation, shaking her head forebodingly.

"Hurrah! and Basil Rutherford is rapidly becoming a wise man also; and, for the future, means solely to trust to the dictates of his own heart, and never attempt to care for any one else but Uda Kirkland; and, what is more to the purpose, begins to cherish the pleasant hope that Mrs. Sherburne is right in her surmise, and that Uda Kirkland cares for nobody but Basil Rutherford!" soliloquised the subject of these remarks, as he galloped along to the house.

And Ermentrude Sherburne has cast herself down, low down upon the floor, on the very spot where, without any demonstration of feeling,

Digitized by Google

only a very little while before she had parted from him. There she sits, tearless, motionless, oblivious to all things but the utter anguish of her desolate heart, silent in her despair! However much she may have struggled to annihilate the feeling, all throughout her life she had loved him, but never so dearly as at the moment when, once more free in the sight of heaven and earth to cherish that love, divining his secret with the sensitive discernment of a loving heart, without counting the cost, of her own unrestrained will to secure his happiness she had rejected him.

Digitized by Google

## CHAPTER XXXI.

Do you happen to know what has become of Uda?" inquired Basil Rutherford, a few days afterwards, hurriedly entering the drawing-room, where alone, by the open window, Grace chanced to be sitting.

"She left the house, about half-an-hour ago, with the intention of walking to Oakley Dell."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Rutherford, taking a vague survey of the apartment. "It is such a lovely afternoon, I wonder you were not tempted to accompany her." Then, having stood by the door in a state of abstraction for five minutes longer, as abruptly as he had made his appearance Basil rushed away.

"I had not the heart to go there; how could he expect it of me!" exclaimed Grace, when again alone. "How cordially distasteful this place is to me!" she continued, passionately, as, rising, she walked out on the verandah: "how ardently I long to bid it adieu for ever! There is not a nook or corner that does not remind me of the past. I stand here now where last I saw him

Digitized by Google

go by full of life and strength, joyous, hopeful—that terrible scene rises up vividly before me, fresh as if had happened only yesterday! Ah! little did I think, as I watched him out of sight, before another day would dawn I should be standing by his lifeless corpse! It was so awful to be cut off in that sudden way, to go down to the cold, silent grave in the morning of life! Oh, Richard! Richard!" And resting her head against the hard iron rails, Grace wept irrepressibly; when she looked up, John Vaughan was standing near her.

"Pardon my intrusion on your sorrow—my coming was truly accidental, but once here, I could not leave you; I cannot bear to see you so unhappy, Miss Holford," he blurted out in a husky voice.

"I am not more unhappy than usual; I am never exactly unhappy, Mr. Vaughan. I was thinking just then of Richard Leigh—at times nearly breaking my heart; some memory connected with him will dart across my mind," gasped Grace, through her tears.

John spoke with such considerate kindness and sympathy, he led Grace on to put more of her innermost thoughts into language than she had done for many a previous day. They conversed long together uninterruptedly. That conversation went far to comfort her; and more, it laid the foundation of a lasting bond of union between them: it was the commencement of a fresh era in both their lives. There came a day, in no very distant future, when John, in secured

Digitized by Google

domestic happiness, fully realised the wisdom and good consequence of Uda's "one little bit of advice—*persevere!*"

Meanwhile Basil rapidly pursued his way to Oakley Dell. Arrived there, he found the object of his search perched up on one of the projecting roots of the old oak, imagining she was reading a book. She greeted his approach with a bright smile of welcome, which made his heart bound with joy; but when he had joined her, he once more grew embarrassed and diffident: "with the time he played," they spoke of "many things."

"You came very opportunely," remarked Uda, at last. "I was occupied with regretful thoughts that the day was drawing near when I must return to Groton: I needed cheering."

"How do you get on there on the whole, Uda?"

"Take it *as* a whole, tolerably well. Mr. Kirkland is so very kind, it is impossible to live there and not learn to care for him. I have every imaginary comfort and kindness showered down on me; but, all the same, I often long to be back in my old home again: my nature, I fear, must be very ungratefully constituted."

"Or rather, unchangeably so; I fear you are too sadly constant, Uda, for light-heartedness in this weathercock world."

"A new fault to discover! The great evil of Groton is its monotony. I never longed to have it in my power to move about from place to place until I went there: it is an irksome existence to what I have previously led. I regret

Digitized by Google

to say I am growing restless, and hard to satisfy, with advancing years."

"You must be good and patient; bend as the trees do to the blast, then you will not break beneath it, but right yourself again."

"The trees lose many branches in a high wind, Mr. Rutherford, whilst '*righting*' themselves."

"Only the weak and withered ones; they can afford them and be all the better for their loss. Uda, be advised; esteem life as a glorious boon to the last, trials and difficulties included. Once upon a time, when I was accustomed to see you every day, I used to take it as a mere matter of daily occurrence; now to be with you has become so very rare a pleasure, I prize these conversations as bright gleams of happiness," the next moment Basil added, unconnectedly.

"Do you?" said Uda, sadly; "I can most sincerely echo, so do I."

"What a beautiful bunch of forget-me-nots you have in your hand! Where did they come from?" he hastily remarked again, *àpropos* to nothing, as she finished speaking.

"I gathered them by the brook: would you like to have some?"

"As you will; though you and I scarcely need token-flowers to remind us of one another."

"Not exactly, unless it be as the Duchesse de Bretagne exchanged them with Henry of Lancaster, 'in token of good will and remembrance.'"

Digitized by Google

"With that understanding I gladly accept them."

His eyes were earnestly bent on her, but she neither looked up nor made answer.

> "That blue and bright-eyed flow'ret of the brook,
> Hope's gentle gem, the fair Forget-me-not,"

quoted Basil, selecting some sprays from Miss Kirkland's nosegay.—"Would you also give me a few blossoms with that significance implied, Uda?"

"If you desire it."

"I do desire it. Yet, remembering a former conversation, I fear to hope. Do you recollect what you once told me; the time, the evening succeeding the ball at Holford; the place, the drawing-room at Grantham?"

"I do."

"It seems too presumptuous a thought to indulge, but if I only dared reconcile the hope with the constancy, Uda——"

"What would be the result?" she murmured, with shy precipitation.

"That then I should consider myself to be the happiest man alive! Oh, Uda, there has been, I do believe, sad misunderstanding existing between us for a long time past, do not let it continue. Must I say more? Uda, cannot you read my heart?"

She turned away her blushing face; and for sole response mutely tendered him the forget-me-nots.

"In what spirit are they offered?" im-

Digitized by Google

pulsively he whispered; wistfully looking up in her face, tightly clasping the little hand that held the flowers in his own.

"As you would wish," she tremulously murmured.

"Ermentrude!"

THE END.

LONDON:
STRANGEWAYS & WALDEN (LATE G. BARCLAY), PRINTERS,
28 Castle Street, Leicester Square.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# BOOKS PUBLISHED BY L. BOOTH,

## 307 REGENT STREET, W.

*Second Thousand. Now ready, price* 10*s.* 6*d.*

## ELKERTON RECTORY;

BEING PART THE SECOND OF "TWENTY YEARS IN THE CHURCH."

By THE REV. JAMES PYCROFT, B.A.

### Opinions of the Press.

"The refined drollery and quiet satire that run through the narrative reminds one of Sydney Smith."—*St. James's Chronicle*, June 7th.

"Mr. Pycroft is at the height of prosperity. . . . Such a story as *Elkerton Rectory*, a narrative of the daily doings of a clergyman's family, after they have struggled into smoother water than that of the stream which many a poor married curate has to breast—to those who live within the charmed circle these details will be touching."—*Athenæum*, June 9th.

"We noticed the first part of this work in the autumn of last year, and most of the general observations which we then made upon the tone and spirit of that work apply in a great measure to the volume before us."—*The English Churchman*, May 31st.

"*Elkerton Rectory* has a great deal of the charm of *Twenty Years in the Church*, and the natural air and style with which it is written will give to it, as to its predecessor, a long and general popularity."—*John Bull*, July 14th.

"*Elkerton Rectory* is one of the most charming stories we have read many a day. It is a perfect picture of the cares and pleasures, the sorrows and the joys, of country clerical life. It is the production of a gentleman whose good sense is equal to his powers as a writer, and whose sound and moderate churchmanship vies with his knowledge of the world, and his ability to depict things as they are."—*Morning Herald*, September 7th.

"*Elkerton Rectory*, being Part the Second of *Twenty Years in the Church*, will be hailed with pleasure by those who have read the former portion. These experiences of clerical life convey many truthful and profitable lessons to such as would wish in their own persons to make the ministerial office reverenced and influential, as well as practically useful. They act, moreover, as a beacon, to point out the shoals and quicksands which not unfrequently beset the clergyman's voyage through life. We like greatly the sensible advice given by the village doctor to the overtasked pastor."—*Critic*.

Digitized by Google

*In preparation, a Fourth and Cheaper Edition of*

# TWENTY YEARS IN THE CHURCH.

*By REV. JAMES PYCROFT, B.A.*

AUTHOR OF "RECOLLECTIONS OF COLLEGE DAYS," ETC.

1 vol. crown 8vo. price 2*s.* 6*d.*

"The book is easy, natural, good-humoured, yet shrewd; tells of common things in a familiar way, and pleases partly from telling what everybody knows, partly from telling what is not always known concerning well-known things."—*Dublin University Magazine*, March.

"*Twenty Years in the Church*, lately published, is one of the best expositions of the Church system in its merits and defects which has appeared for years."—*Daily News*, Nov. 1.

"*Twenty Years in the Church* is written on a subject that appeals to the multitude, and treated by Mr. Pycroft in an honest, manly manner, and is quite as good a novel as *Tom Brown's School Days*, and we shall be greatly surprised if it does not become as popular."—*The Leader*, Aug. 27.

"Mr. Pycroft has much to say, and he says it well."—*Post*, Sept. 6.

"Since the day when the Rev. Sydney Smith lashed the follies and vices of the period which he so brilliantly adorned, we have not met with so poignant and truth-telling a writer as the author of *Twenty Years in the Church*."—*Reading Mercury*, Aug. 13.

"Under the above title we have another of those life-like pictures of men and things as they are, which are fast succeeding the ideal personages and fictitious events of the once popular Romance."—*Leicester Mercury*, Oct. 22.

"We rarely meet with a volume to engage and gratify our attention so well as this has done, at once by high literary qualities and the solid interest of its subjects."—*Daily News*, Nov. 3.

"The illustrative anecdotes are capital in themselves, and entirely to the point."—*Globe*.

"A gifted writer, like Mr. Pycroft, is under a moral obligation to exercise his talents for the benefit of society; and we are happy to see him so often come forward to acquit himself of this obligation."—*Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, Aug. 24.

"We can recommend the work as one of deep interest, and worthy of the most extensive circulation."—*Brighton Gazette*.

"The loss of the artistic effects which give interest to a novel, is more than compensated by the naturalness of the characters and scenes portrayed."—*The Press*, Aug. 20.

"This is a storehouse of plain, manly, and vigorous common-sense, applied to nearly every practical question that can concern a clergyman in the present day."—*The Literary Gazette*.

"The author appears to us to have on hand—either in writing or in his memory—a series of sketches, anecdotes, and smart and odd sayings."—*The English Churchman*, Sept. 22.

"Young clergymen may probably learn something from these pages; there are some good hints given in them as to preaching, reading, and parish visiting."—*The Critic*, Aug. 20.

Digitized by Google

"It is certainly a remarkable book—a book replete with thought and with incentives to thought. Our sympathies are with him from first to last."—*St. James's Chronicle.*

"Mr. Pycroft's book is full of reality. It gives us a graphic sketch of a career in the Church and pictures of parochial life which are clearly full of truthfulness."—*Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, Sept. 15.

"It is unexceptionable teaching."—*Illustrated Times.*

"*Twenty Years in the Church* purports to be the history of a working clergyman, told by himself. The Reverend Henry Austin is a figment, but the book which relates his experiences, his reflections, and his aspirations, is not a romance or a novel; it belongs to another order of fiction for which a name is still wanting. It is important that this distinction should be understood from the outset, for it would be an injustice to the author, and a misfortune for the reader, if a book so able in its kind, and so suggestive, were to be judged by alien rules and precedents."—*Spectator*, Aug. 20.

"It brings before us the career of hundreds of English clergymen, their aspirations, struggles, disappointments, and practical life, as exemplified in Henry Austin, the hero of the book."—*The Literary Observer.*

"Our opinion of this useful and entertaining work is amply supported by numerous reviews (the *Spectator*, *Press*, *Leader*, *Athenæum*, *Literary Gazette*, and others), but above all the Christian reader will prize the following from the Bishop of Lincoln:—'I thank you for sundry half-hours most pleasantly and profitably spent. On not a few points I differ: still you have drawn a truthful picture of the trials of the clergy, both from within and from without.'"—*The Brighton Gazette.*

"This will enable everybody to be interested in the book. High Church and Low Church persons,—dignified and undignified,—the superior and inferior order of clergymen, may each be amused at each other's portraits; and if not a vast deal of good done, a pleasant half-hour spent over Mr. Pycroft's book."—*Athenæum.*

"We rejoice to see Mr. Pycroft again in print. There is a charm in his writings which it is difficult briefly to define, because it is the result of so many valuable qualities in combination."—*Bath Herald*, Aug. 20.

"Mr. Pycroft is evidently a man of general observation. In passing through life he has acquired a large amount of practical knowledge."—*Exeter Gazette*, Oct. 1.

"*Twenty Years in the Church* is a striking picture of clerical life, conveying truthful and profitable lessons to those who would make the pastoral office practically useful, influential, and sincerely revered."—*Lincoln and Stamford Mercury*, Sept. 23.

"This is an extremely clever and amusing book."—*Daily Telegraph.*

---

# WAYS AND WORDS OF MEN OF LETTERS:

## A SERIES OF LITERARY EXTRACTS AND ESSAYS.

BY THE REV. J. PYCROFT, B.A.

AUTHOR OF "TWENTY YEARS IN THE CHURCH," "ELKERTON RECTORY," ETC. ETC.

1 vol. post 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.*

Digitized by Google

# THE EARL'S CEDARS: A ROMANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "SMUGGLERS AND FORESTERS."

2 vols. post 8vo. 21*s.*

"A genuine work of art. The story is full of movement; the characters are numerous, well-defined, and life-like; and the language is compact, easy, and graphic."—*Spectator.*

"We can safely recommend these volumes to such as desire the distraction of a right pleasant book."—*Critic.*

"Lady Honoria is a creation of great power and originality."—*Somersetshire County Herald.*

"The story of a village doctor and an earl's daughter, written with a grace, a delicacy, and a pathos which have seldom or never been surpassed."—*Bath and Cheltenham Gazette.*

"We can bestow unqualified praise upon the vigorous manner in which the book is written."—*Dispatch.*

"The pictures of home life that appear in the first volume are pleasant to dwell upon, while the conflicting circumstances of the latter portion of the tale are very ingeniously disclosed."—*Sun.*

---

Just published, 1 vol. post 8vo. price 10*s.* 6*d.*

# THE LONG RUN.

A NOVEL.

By HENRY OWGAN, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "OUT ON THE WORLD," ETC.

"*The Long Run* is decidedly a brilliant sketch of life, and an effective exposition of some momentous phases of human nature."—*Sun.*

"*The Long Run* is rather a good novel. It is written in a rich and vigorous style; there are a glow and fulness about the language which lead the reader on and on with a sense of pleasure."—*Morning Post*, Aug. 29.

"The scene of the novel is chiefly laid in Ireland; and as picturesque description is evidently the author's *forte*, he has ample opportunity of revelling in it . . . The dialogues are infused with much dramatic spirit, and are quite up to the mark, while the style is otherwise fluent and energetic."—*Dispatch*, July 14.

"Those who wish to read a genuine, spirited, life-like story of modern times and manners, full of lively and truthful delineations of character and vigorous scenes . . . will do well to provide themselves with Mr. Owgan's new work entitled *The Long Run.*"—*Leader*, July 14.

Digitized by Google

# A LIFE STRUGGLE.

By MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF "THE POOR RELATION," "LIFE OF MARIE DE MEDICIS," "LIFE OF LOUIS XVI.," ETC.

2 vols. 21*s.*

"It is a delightful change to get hold of a tale like the *Life Struggle*, in which a succession of lively incidents and stirring adventures is never broken by the introduction of unnecessary pages of mere word-building."—*Post.*

---

Just published, 1 vol. fcap. 8vo. cloth, price 3*s.* 6*d.*

# THE FRENCH UNDER ARMS.

By BLANCHARD JERROLD.

"The book, which is light in manner, is solid in substance. If very agreeable to read, it will be found no less useful to remember."—*Athenæum*, Sept. 8.

"The recent exploits of the French army in Italy have very much stimulated public curiosity as to the composition of its various corps. People like to know all about these wonderful Zouaves, &c. . . . . All this they will find tersely and pleasantly narrated in Mr. Jerrold's work."—*United Service Gazette*, Sept. 29.

"This is a chatty, desultory volume, which will probably be found interesting by amateur military readers. The accounts of Minié (the inventor of the rifle that bears his name), of the Zouaves, and of the Foreign Legions of France, are pleasantly written."—*Economist*, Nov.

---

*BY THE HON. LENA EDEN.*

# EASTON AND ITS INHABITANTS;

OR,

# SKETCHES OF LIFE IN A COUNTRY TOWN.

1 vol. post 8vo. price 10*s.* 6*d.*

"Our worthy contemporary is doing 'no harm,' but, on the contrary, is conferring a public benefit, in calling attention to the skilfully-conceived plot and lively sketches contained in *Easton*."—*Morning Post*, May 21.

*By the same Author.*

# FALSE AND TRUE.

1 vol. post 8vo. price 10*s.* 6*d.*

"In some points the Honourable Lena Eden's *False and True* is an improvement upon her previous fiction of *Easton and its Inhabitants*."—*Spectator*, April 16.

Digitized by Google

*BY JULIA TILT,*

AUTHOR OF "MAY HAMILTON," "THE OLD PALACE," ETC.

## MILLICENT NEVILLE.

2 vols. post 8vo. price 21*s.*

"Miss Tilt has achieved popularity; she is already a favourite, and *Millicent Neville* is quite equal to either *The Old Palace* or *May Hamilton*." — *Daily Telegraph.*

"There is a healthy tone about the story which is a relief to the reader of modern novels."— *Morning Post.*

*By the same Author.*

1 vol. post 8vo. price 10*s.* 6*d.*

## MAY HAMILTON.

"*May Hamilton* is an interesting novel."— *Morning Post.*
"An entertaining and very readable story."—*Athenæum.*

---

Just published, with plates, 8vo. price 1*s.* 6*d.* post free.

## THE THERMO-ELECTRICAL, or NATURAL SYSTEM OF MEDICINE;

OR,

## THE SCIENCE OF LIFE, HEALTH, AND DISEASE.

Explanatory of all the Phenomena of Life, and the Nature, Causes, and Treatment of Disease.

BY CHARLES SEARLE, M.D. M.R.C.S.E.

---

Just published,

## ROSA VON TANNENBERG.

A NOVEL FOR YOUNG PERSONS.

From the German of SCHMIDT.

1 vol. post 8vo. cloth, price 2*s.* 6*d.*

Digitized by Google

# SHAKESPEARE.

## THE EDITION OF 1623.

At Press, and will appear with all possible expedition consistent with the satisfactory accomplishment of the work, MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES, HISTORIES AND TRAGEDIES, PUBLISHED ACCORDING TO THE TRUE ORIGINALL COPIES. London, Printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623, and now to be reprinted in one volume, — the size to range with all demy octavo editions of the Poet's works — page for page — line for line — word for word — with carefully-executed Facsimiles of all the Original Typographical Ornaments. By L. BOOTH, 307 REGENT STREET, W.

"The First Folio is, in my opinion, the only edition worth regarding; and it is much to be wished that an Edition of Shakespeare were given *literatim* according to the First Folio, which is now become so scarce and dear that few persons can obtain it. For, by the presumptuous licence of the dwarfish commentators, who are for ever cutting him down to their own size, we risque the loss of Shakespeare's genuine text, which that Folio actually contains, notwithstanding some few slight errors of the press, which might be noted without altering."—HORNE TOOKE, *Diversions of Purley*.

"The work has been in preparation and at press since November last, yet its announcement is rather more premature than it would have been, but for the appearance in the *Athenæum*, January the 14th, of the following remarks, curiously pertinent to the work now in progress. In reference to Dr. Susan's Dutch Translation of Shakespeare, it says:— 'We know not how far Dr. Susan has been or will be remunerated for his great labour and industry, but we cannot help thinking that if anybody in this country would undertake to reprint Shakespeare's works in the very letters of the original edition, *and in an Octavo Form*, the experiment would be attended with profit."—*Athenæum*, Jan. 14, 1860.

It is hoped, and scarcely doubted, that the lovers of Shakespearian Literature will render due proof, that this curiously coincident expression of opinion was substantially founded.

The Work completed will be printed on Three Papers, the size announced above—on Royal Octavo and on Folio, the latter being on Writing Paper. There will also be a small impression of each Play *separately* on Small Quarto.

---

Price 2*s.* 6*d.*

# A MANUAL OF WILLS.

By GEORGE BOOTH, Solicitor.

Clearly explaining the necessary forms for making out these important Documents, with such Instructions in framing a Will as render errors nearly impossible to those who read this little Manual attentively.

"Blessed be those,
How mean soe'er, that have their honest wills."
SHAKSPEARE.

Digitized by Google

*Thirtieth Thousand.*

## HYMNS FOR A WEEK.

BY CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

Price 1*s.* cloth gilt.

Sold for the Benefit of St. Mary's Hall, Brighton.

*Also, by the same Author,*

## HOURS OF SORROW

## CHEERED AND COMFORTED.

Second Edition. Price 2*s.* cloth gilt.

---

Price 2*s.* 6*d.* cloth boards,

## LAYS OF THE SABBATH,

APPROPRIATE FOR EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

BY THE REV. JOHN B. BRODERICK,
RECTOR OF SNEATON, NEAR WHITBY.

---

*Now ready,*

MISS CUYLER'S NEW NOVEL,

## CHANGE;

OR,

## SOME PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF BASIL RUTHERFORD.

1 vol. post 8vo.

---

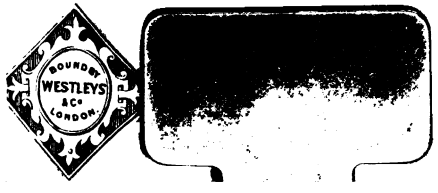
LONDON: L. BOOTH, 307 REGENT STREET, W.

6

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google




Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google